

**Exploring the meaning of concert dress in female vocal performance: a  
phenomenological study**

**By**

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## Abstract

Concert dress has both a psychological and a physical impact on female performers (Griffiths 2011). This research study aimed to examine the meaning of concert dress in the performances of female classical vocalists.

This research was a qualitative study, using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a qualitative strategy of inquiry. The research participants included six experienced South African female classical vocalists between the ages of 30 and 55 and a South African concert dress designer based in New York.

The research results suggested that, in view of the powerful influence of concert dress on the formation of a first impression, concert dress is, without a doubt, an important part of a performance. The meaning of concert dress is influenced by a number of factors. The study found that concert dress has a deep psychological impact on most of the participants and a physical impact on all the participants. The psychological effects of concert dress manifested in feelings of confidence and empowerment and also in the participants' impression of body image. On the other hand, the physical effects of concert dress manifested in either comfort or discomfort, a positive/negative effect of dress on the singing technique and even injury as a result of an ill fit. In addition, if concert dress has a physical impact, this may manifest as a psychological impact and vice versa. Other factors which contributed to the selection of concert dress included the audience, personal style, and the criteria for concert dress. This study also explores modern trends such as body-focused dress. The participants agreed that concert dress should be a balanced representation of both the selected repertoire and the singer's individuality.

Although there are many factors which contribute to the meaning of concert dress to a female classical vocalist, all the participants cited a universal requirement, namely, it is essential that concert dress is comfortable.

**Key words:** female classical vocalist, concert dress, performance, body image, repertoire, empowerment through dress, inhibiting factors of dress.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and rationale

#### 1.1 Introduction

For an hour and ten minutes, the public has nothing to do but look at you. If you don't really fascinate them with your voice, no matter how you fascinate them with your role or your voice [sic], they still have all the time, which means an hour and ten minutes to cut you to pieces, take your costume, cut it to pieces. So if you don't really give it the best, you are in for disaster (*Maria Callas: The Callas Conversations*. Kaurich & Gavin 1968).

In the extract quoted above Maria Callas emphasises the vulnerability and pressure performers often experience, perceiving the audience as critical listeners and viewers about what they are seeing and hearing. In my opinion the visual aspect of performance is even more relevant to vocalists than it is to instrumentalists because vocalists 'are' their own instruments. In other words, the vocalist's body is the vehicle of sound production while conveying musical meaning and emotions through gestures and facial expressions. It is essential that vocalists are technically and artistically proficient and also that they are visually appealing. Several studies, including those conducted by Griffiths (2009) and Darrow, Mazza and Wapnic (1998), have emphasised the fact that the visual aspect of a music performance is often equally as important as the auditory experience.

Concert dress, therefore, plays an important role in musical communication. As stated by Griffiths (2009), audiences have preconceived notions about what they expect to see when they attend a performance by a classical musician. For example, she alludes to societal expectations about appropriate dress when she writes that "the social construction of classical music and the values attributed to it may determine the precise ways in which concert dress features in performance" (Griffiths 2011: 31). This suggests that attire is closely linked to the perceived notions about what is appropriate for classical music and for the genre of music being performed. In other words, what to wear for a performance is important and it is a decision that should not be taken lightly. Researchers have established that performer attractiveness unequivocally affects the audience's perception of performance expertise.

Performing artists use dress as an expression of individuality and personal style. This is even more relevant in the case of female classical vocalists who should also take their repertoire into consideration. For example, it would be inappropriate to sing an opera aria or give a Lieder recital in casual wear. Griffiths (2009: 159) found that observers have a strong sense of the appropriateness of dress when it comes to the genre of music being performed and that inappropriate, body-focused dress may have a negative effect on the audience's perception of the performer's musical abilities. Griffiths' (2009: 172) findings further confirmed that audience members rated performers who were appropriately dressed (in concert dress) as more competent compared to those who were perceived to be inappropriately dressed.

My curiosity about the role of concert dress in performance stemmed from my own performance experience. I realised that concert dress undoubtedly affects my performance because I feel somewhat more confident when I am wearing a dress that appears to be appropriate to the repertoire I am singing, while also bearing in mind that the dress should be as comfortable as possible. In addition, as an assistant to a wedding gown designer, I am fascinated by the change in persona (body language and posture) when clients fit their beautiful dresses. Based on my subjective experience of concert dress playing a significant role in my own performance, as well as the fact that much research, for example, that of Ryan and Costa-Giomi (2004) and Kennedy and Parks (2007) has focused on the audience's perceptions and biases regarding dress and performance expertise. I was curious about other singers' perspectives of the importance and meaning of concert dress. Griffiths (2009: 175) mentions the following in her recommendation that further research be conducted:

Most if not all research on the visual in music performance has come from an audience perception of view, and discussions with performers as to what they hope and expect to convey to their audience through dress and movements would be greatly insightful.

I was not able to find any research investigating phenomenological, self-report experiences of concert dress from the perspective of female classical vocalists.

## **1.2 Aims of the research study**

This study aimed to investigate female classical vocalists' perceptions and experiences of the effect and importance of concert dress as regards the performance of classical music.

The views of an international dress designer working with prominent female classical vocalists were also sought in order to ascertain whether singers do, indeed, make specific requests when choosing a dress design for a performance. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with vocalists and the dress designer in order to investigate themes surrounding dress, including appropriate dress, body-image, body movement and stage behaviour. In view of the fact that phenomenological experiences as regards the choice of concert dress have been under-researched (Griffiths 2009: 175), this study aimed to make a contribution to the field by exploring concert dress from the performer's perspective.

The study also aimed to link the results of this phenomenological study, which focused on the vocalists' perspective, with existing research which emphasised the audience's perspective.

### **1.3 Research questions**

#### **Primary research question**

What is the meaning of concert dress in female vocal performance?

#### **Sub-questions**

- In what ways are concert dress and a positive body image connected?
- To what extent does choice of repertoire affect the selection of concert dress?
- To what extent does dress influence the stage behaviour and body movements of the female classical vocalist?

### **1.4 Paradigmatic perspective**

In accordance with the recommendations of Maree (2007: 291), the study used an interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach, thus enabling the researcher to interact closely with the participants in order to gain an insight into and form a clear understanding of the female classical vocalists' self-report experiences of appropriate concert dress.

Maree (2007:59) maintains that, in terms of the interpretivist paradigm, social life is human and that life may only be understood from within. Thus, interpretivists assume that reality is

not objectively determined but, rather, that it may be grasped only through understanding social contacts and perceptions. Every situation is unique and it is important to interpret and understand the meanings constructed (Maree 2007: 59).

Maree (2007: 21) states that there should be no difference between the researcher and the object being studied. Facts do not speak for themselves. Interpretation is, thus, key to this study because behaviour is established by social conventions.

## **1.5 Methodology**

The methodology used in the study will be briefly discussed in this section, while chapter 3 contains a more detailed discussion of the research methods used. This study investigated female classical vocalists' experience of concert dress in performances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the female classical vocalists, during which they clarified their perceptions of the importance of the visual aspect of a concert performance, specifically pertaining to dress and the effects of dress on both stage behaviour and performance quality. The opinions of an international concert dress designer were also sought to give an additional dimension to the role of concert dress.

The study adopted a qualitative stance which was based on an interpretative, phenomenological analysis in order to explore, in the data analysis, the effect of concert dress on the performances of female classical vocalists.

### **Selection of participants/sampling**

The study used purposeful sampling as the participants were selected according to preselected criteria. The participants were required to be female classical vocalists with at least five years professional experience in recital performances.

The extensive experience of the international dress designer meant that his skills in and knowledge of the field of concert dress were extremely valuable and, thus, were also included in the research study.'

### **Data collection strategy**

The participants were invited telephonically and via email to take part in the study. The data collection process involved a series of semi-structured interviews, which were audio-taped. I conducted the majority of the interviews face to face, where possible. However, the participant who was abroad, namely, the international dress designer, was invited to complete the semi-structured questionnaire online in as much detail as possible. The data analysis was conducted in conjunction with the data collection to ensure data saturation (Maree 2007: 79).

All the interviews were recorded by digital/electronic means. Thereafter, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### **Data analysis and data interpretation**

The data from the questionnaire and the interviews were collated in order to establish emerging codes and themes. The themes were then compared to information from the literature review. Accordingly, I used inductive codes, allowing them to emerge from the data. The analysed data were then structured into categories which were labelled and discussed.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the data collected during the interviews were verified with the participants. The use of multiple data sources enhances the trustworthiness of research findings (Maree 2007: 113) and, thus, the data collected from the interviews were compared with information from the literature in order to verify the results.

### **Role of the researcher**

In the interpretative field of research the researcher is required to be an active participant (interviewer), thus comprising an integral part of the data (Maree 2007: 298). As the researcher I acknowledge the risk of bias. However, possible bias was kept under control by quality criteria, verifying the data and using multiple data sources where possible in order to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the study and, thus, avoid ethical issues.

My role in the interviews, whether face to face or by email, was to observe, listen carefully and to abide by the ethical guidelines. I also assumed the role of data transcriber and data analyst and was responsible for the crystallisation of the data.

## **1.6 Ethical considerations**

### **Informed consent and voluntary participation**

After the participants had notified me that they were willing to participate in the study, they were contacted telephonically and via email to arrange the interview appointments. At the beginning of the interviews I briefly explained the research topic as well as the purpose of the study. I also explained that the participant was free to withdraw from the study at any time. At the interview the participants were given a letter of consent, explaining the research process. The participants were requested to read the letter and to ask questions, should anything be unclear, as well as to sign the letter. In the case of the participant who was abroad the questionnaire containing the interview questions was emailed to him.

### **Protection from harm**

My role as researcher included ensuring that participants were not exposed to any physical or psychological harm (Maree 2007: 300). During the research process, I attempted to be honest and respectful towards the participants.

### **Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

Burns (2000, cited in Maree 2007: 301) states that it is essential that both the researcher and the participant have a clear understanding of the confidentiality of the research results and the findings of the study. All of the participants' information and responses to the interviews/questionnaire were treated confidentially, unless otherwise agreed. The results obtained from the study were presented anonymously, with the identities of the participants being withheld. All the recorded material from the interviews will be kept in the Department of Music for 15 years. Thereafter, it will be destroyed. I conducted the research in accordance with the Ethics and Research Statement provided by the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria (Maree 2007: 301).

## **1.7 Delimitations of the study**

This study did not seek to prescribe what should be regarded as attractive or appropriate dress but to investigate the direct effect concert dress may have on the female classical vocalist's experience of performance; this ties in with the musicological concepts of identity, body and feminism.

## **1.8 Chapter outline**

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the study. The chapter also discussed the rationale behind the study and the research questions, and clarified the concepts used.

Chapter 2 contains a review of existing literature on the physical aspects of performance and the perceptions that were explored during the research process.

Chapter 3 contains a thick description of the research process. The research design and research methodology were also discussed.

Chapter 4 presents the research results and raw data.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the data as well as the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 presents a summary of the research results, the conclusions drawn from the study as well as recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction

Dress has an impact on both self-perception and the perception of others (Guy & Banim, 2000). The awareness of general appearance may be heightened in a performance situation as audiences spend a long time looking at a performer. As a result, performances may become extremely daunting for performers. Consequently, self-consciousness has the potential to stand between a perfect performance and one which is marred by nervous tension.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature that pertains to certain key aspects of dress and the effect of dress on both sides of the perception-spectrum; the self as well as from the observer's eye. In relation to the spectrum of self-perception, the chapter will discuss relevant literature on identity, body image and femininity. The effects of clothing in general will then be explored.

#### 2.2 Female identity: body image and femininity

Body image is an extremely broad concept and, thus, it needs to be conceptualised within the context of current research. Identity and femininity speak directly both to the notion of body-image and to the general positive and negative effects that dress can have on the female body image.

Paillard (1999: 197) postulates that there are two important psychological concepts that form the basis of a phenomenological study of the self, namely, body schema and body image. The definition of body schema refers to both postural habits and the physical (superficial) stance of the body, as well to the mapping thereof. On the other hand, body image can be defined as “an internal representation of the conscious experience of the visual, tactile and motor information of corporal origin” (Paillard 1999: 197).

Rudd and Lennon (2001) investigated the inclusion of body image in textile and clothing subject matter in tertiary institutions. They presented discussions on the aesthetic and



social related theories associated with body image. Rudd and Lennon (2001: 120) define body image as the mental picture we have of our bodies. This image includes both affective and perceptual components. It affects the way in which we interact with clothes and how the clothed appearance is presented publically. According to Rudd and Lennon (2001: 129), body dissatisfaction is prevalent in women, often resulting in dangerous behaviour which is designed to achieve appearance management.

In studying young feminists' experiences of body consciousness and beauty ideals, Rubin, Nemeroff and Russo (2004) examined the views of both undergraduate and graduate women using a qualitative investigation. They found that the participants described themselves as being constantly aware of and attending to their bodies (Rubin et al. 2004: 34). Rubin et al. (2004) further argue that body consciousness is a strategy which is used by women to deal with others' reactions to their bodies. Their participants used body consciousness to protect their self-concept.

Grogan (2008: 42) is of the opinion that women in Western societies tend to perceive themselves as heavier than they really are, and they are constantly striving to be thinner than their current size. Feminist approaches to understanding women's body image suggest that women endure pressure to conform to the "slender ideal" which is associated with success and youth. This may have a dangerous effect as a result of dieting and cosmetic surgery (Grogan 2008: 41, 80).

Social pressure to conform to the prevailing ideals of beauty has caused women to change their body shape in order to conform to current fashions (Grogan 2008: 16, 41). In the Middle Ages, a full-figured body was considered to be more attractive because it was associated with fertility. The more slender figures became more popular only in the 20th century when this type of slender figure became the focus of successful marketing in the fashion industry. This was also when the slender body became the standard of cultural beauty in affluent societies (Grogan 2008: 19).

Rubinstein (1995: 151) elaborates on the fact that costume and style have always been devoted to debilitating the female body. For example, there were the corsets and long, voluminous dresses that hindered physical movement and self-expression. Clearly, the

meaning of appearance is closely linked to gender expectations relating to behaviour (Rubinstein 1995: 83).

Expanding on the issues of dress and gender expectations relating to behaviour, Rubinstein (1995) examined the history of women in authoritative positions. Rubinstein (1995) found that these women wore dresses that de-emphasised the maternal and nurturing role by adopting an image of masculinity and confluence. The women created this image by wearing attire that flattened the breasts and hid the waistline (Rubinstein 1995: 95). In other words, in order to successfully assume an authoritative position a woman had to look more masculine.

Similarly, in the 1970s, when women became more prominent in managerial roles, they found that, in order to be considered professional, they had to appear less feminine. The jacket is an important garment in creating a less feminine look in that it conceals the contours of the female body (Rubenstein 1995). Laver (1969, cited in Rubinstein 1995: 83) suggests that the social spheres in which women and men function are identified by sex-specific attire such as trousers and skirts. He explains this statement by referring to men wearing “class-conscious” attire in order to reflect their social standing, while female attire is governed by the “seductive principal” and is, thus, designed to make women attractive and desirable to men and, thus, inferior to them.

In view of the fact that this study focuses on the phenomenological experiences of female classical vocalists with regard to concert dress, I will focus on literature that addresses the effect of dress on self-image and perceptions.

### **2.3 General effect of clothes on self-image**

It is evident that clothes have a significant impact on the physical and psychological perspectives of body image. According to Hollander (1993: 314), “clothes create at least half the look of any person at any moment”. Hollander highlights the significance of clothes in the formation of first impressions by referring to the various messages conveyed by clothes and the ability of clothes to suggest, persuade, connote, insinuate and lie (Hollander 1993: 355). As a result of the importance of clothes to the individual self-image, clothes may be

thought of as an entirely psychological and social phenomenon and as tangible as emotions, manners and habits (Hollander 1993: xv).

In their discussion on clothes as a “psychological phenomena”, Guy and Banim (2000) investigated women’s dynamic, complex relationship with and self-presentation through clothes by qualitatively exploring the views of 15 women, aged between 21 and 54. Guy and Banim argue that women have a dynamic relationship with clothes and that this dynamic relationship may be divided into the following three views of the self, namely, the woman I want to be; the woman I fear I could be; and the woman I am most of the time (Guy & Banim 2000: 313).

Guy and Banim (2000) found that, in accordance with these three views, women try to establish a positive self-image by selecting clothes that fulfil their preferred role. Consequently, clothing that did not serve the body caused the women to feel out of control in a situation, thus resulting in both a negative body image and a negative relationship with their clothes (Guy & Banim 2000: 319). They also found that women use clothes to conceal those parts of their bodies with which they are dissatisfied, although clothes may highlight problem areas in the body rather than conceal them. The participants were instructed to express what clothes meant to them. One participant reported in a personal account that

... my overriding concern is to make sure that my bottom is hidden from view ... In fact, my primary concern when I buy clothes is to disguise my hips and my bottom which I am very conscious of. Yet I know that rationally speaking I am not overweight – it’s just the shape of my body that needs some help.

“The woman I fear I could be” does not necessarily relate to the fact that women dislike either their body shapes or their clothes, but rather to their fear of losing their ability to know how to dress or to manage their appearance (Guy & Banim 2000: 320).

Guy and Banim (2000: 317) concluded that projecting an image of competence was of the utmost importance. The women highlighted the importance of achieving a distinctive and personal look through clothes, as well the importance of the person being noticed rather than merely the clothes. Snyder and Fromkin (1980, cited in Guy & Banim 2000: 316) explain that obtaining a “personal look” involves creating a degree of uniqueness rather than total difference.

Tyner and Ogle (2007: 87) conducted an interpretative analysis of dress-related meanings in certain issues of the feminist periodical magazine *Ms.*. A content analysis of the magazine between 1972 and 2002 revealed two opposing themes, namely, experiences of oppression through dress, and experiences of empowerment and self-realisation through dress. In a letter to the editor, a reader commented that doing her best to appear well dressed was a direct reflection of how well prepared she was (Tyner & Ogle 2007: 87).

This view is confirmed by a contributor to the magazine who stated: “Calculating the impact of clothes is useful in making the right first impression and in projecting an image of responsibility, authority, or power” (Tyner & Ogle 2007: 87). Similar to the findings of Guy and Banim (2000), Tyner and Ogle (2007) conclude that “appearances count”.

It is evident that both self-perception and self-realisation are significantly affected by appearance and that clothing plays an integral role in appearance. Dress-related meanings can be both negative and positive, affecting not only self-perception but also the perceptions of others. Women experience enormous pressure to conform to the prevailing cultural ideals of fashion and perceived beauty although, ironically, these ideals often serve to oppress those who fall outside the established ideals.

#### **2.4 Body image of female classical performers**

In relation to the body image of the female classical musician, DeNora (2002) discusses the historical relationship between music and gender formation in the 19th century. The first occurrence of gender segregation was noted with the performance of Beethoven’s piano music. Beethoven’s music is associated with strong and stable men, while, in contrast, women are perceived to be passive, unstable and delicate. Consequently, women did not publically perform Beethoven’s piano music or play instruments that were regarded as unflattering to their delicate physique, for example wind instruments and the cello (DeNora 2002: 28). Thus, women engaged in musical activities that did not disturb the notion of a docile body. In addition, women’s fashions of the time featured low-cut and figure-focused muslin gowns and, for a woman to display a body while engaged in musical effort or labour, was to “exhibit one’s self in a potentially erotic mode” (DeNora 2002: 30).

Like DeNora (2002), Citron (2004) elaborates on the historical view of female sexuality on display. She found that the notion of sexuality on display had a limiting effect on women, preventing their participation in society. She supports this statement by citing the research of another musicologist, Katherine Ellis (1997), who confirmed that the focus of male critics on female sexuality doomed any chance of the female pianist being taken seriously as a musician in the 19th century (Citron 2004: 49).

Citron (2004) then examined the current status of female sexuality in performance. This is in stark contradiction to the historical principles of female sexuality on stage. Citron (2004) maintains that, in modern performances, female sexuality becomes the centre of attention. Currently, highly successful female classical artists exploit both their sexuality and their allure. Citron (2004) uses Anne-Sophie Mutter as an example of an artist “stressing female sexuality” by wearing alluring, body-focused dress while performing. She also discusses a famous female chamber group, the “Eroica Trio”, which was described as “a feast for the eye as they walked out in drop-dead gowns, sexy and low-cut”. Citron emphasises that the marketing material and CD covers of this female chamber music group highlight their feminine sexuality. This trend is becoming increasingly popular in Western classical music. The changing perceptions of female classical artists in body-focused dress are now governed by norms that are not as strict as in the past. The reason why this type of attire for classical performers is becoming more acceptable in society is the notion that “sex sells” (Citron 2004: 49).

According to Citron (2004), it may now be confusing to make the correct decision when it comes to selecting a dress for a recital. Citron (2004: 49) cites the example of a female graduate student, an accomplished academic and flautist, who felt overwhelmed when confronted with having to choose an outfit to wear as a soloist. The student described her decision as both a political and a moral decision: should she choose to ignore the decorative or display element or should she deliberately choose something sexy? Citron (2004: 56) suspects that the pressures of making the correct decision in terms of dress are exacerbated by the marketing requiring female performers to look sexy. This may be a positive development as it has the potential to increase women’s choices. However, the female body

continues to convey cultural associations that may upset women by reducing their status in society (Citron 2004: 56).

Bartky (1990, cited in Griffiths 2009: 160) is of the opinion that women are under increased pressure to conform to gender stereotypes with reference to dress, body norms and physical appearance. Decoration is often favoured above practicality in women's dress and, thus, it may be difficult for women to project a serious demeanour with dress.

## **2.5 Effects of clothing on female classical performers**

If the performance of someone who is negatively affected by an uncomfortable garment is observed, the first thought that comes to mind is the necessity of not making the same mistake. The majority of current literature on the visual aspect of performance focuses on the audience's audiovisual perception of performances and, as a result, the performer's phenomenological perspective has been largely unexplored.

Davidson (2004: 89) examined key factors in the development of performance skills within the cultural framework of Western classical music. It emerged that presenting oneself in an appropriate and confident manner is considered to be one of the basic skills taught in performance training (Davidson 2004: 98).

Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody (2007) also emphasise the importance of the visual aspect of a performance. Many professional performers experience their early years as a "crash course" in the various extra-musical skills that are required if they are to succeed in the field. Lehmann et al. (2007: 166) further stress this by stating:

What an audience sees in a live performance can heavily influence what it hears. A performer's physical appearance and stage behaviour can affect listeners' judgements of the musical quality produced.

Although musical skills are the most important criterion with which musicians are judged, the visual aspect of live performances has proved to be extremely dominant in the perceptions of audience members (Lehmann et al. 2007: 166). Not enough attention is given to the extra-musical factors of a performance that have a direct impact on the way in which audience members perceive a performer's musicianship (Lehmann et al. 2007: 174). In referring to formal attire as a prerequisite in Western classical music, Lehmann et al. (2007:

166) further state that stage etiquette is highly dependent on musical genre and sociocultural norms (Lehmann et al. 2007: 167).

Griffiths set out to investigate the effects of concert dress and physical appearance on the audience members' perception of the abilities of female classical musicians over a range of genres. Four female violinists were recorded playing pieces of varying genres in four styles of dress, one of which was a nightclubbing dress. The results showed the significant effect of dress on the perception of a performance. This suggests that audience members have a strong concept of appropriate dress by genre and, as a result, inappropriate, body-focused dress may have a negative effect on the audience's perception of musical ability. In addition, not only dress but the performer's body movements also affect the perception of ability.

Through the concert dress, performers confirmed that they understood and accepted the formality and cultural practice of the performance situation and this was reflected by their appropriateness of dress scores. As research has shown, appropriately dressed individuals are perceived as more competent (Douglas & Soloman, 1983) and wearers of the concert dress were given higher musical and technical ability scores.

Thus, dress and genre are closely linked and formal dress in the performance of Western classical music has become the accepted norm, with both audience members and performers alike indicating a preference for formal attire when classical music is performed, as "posh music should equal posh dress" (Griffiths 2009: 175).

Griffiths' study (2009) highlighted the profound effect of clothing on self-perception. One of the participants, who was wearing the nightclubbing dress, was reluctant to leave the dressing room as she felt "too exposed" (Griffiths 2009: 171). This psychological reaction of the violinist to her clothing is an example of "the woman I fear I could be" (Guy & Banim 2000). Her reluctance to leave the dressing room pointed to the negative impact of the dress on her body image, with the dress making her feel insecure. Griffiths (2009) refers to the historical marginalisation of women because of an association with the body as a dominant characteristic. As a result, their creative skills have been overshadowed by a focus on their bodies (Griffiths 2009: 171). Griffiths (2009: 160) further states that female performers, who wear clothing that seems to be both restrictive and essentially decorative, appear physically less competent as regards their ability to create a believable interpretation of the music. These findings are, however, at odds with the conclusions of

Citron (2004), who states that concert dress of a more alluring and sexual nature may be beneficial to the performance career of the female classical musician.

The use of dress which conforms to both current fashion and current beauty ideology in a performance situation reflects how serious the performer is and how well all the aspects of the performance have been deliberated upon. It is essential that performers be aware that audiences make rash judgements based on their initial impressions of appearance and abilities (Greene 2002).

Clothing and the effect of clothing on the psychological behaviour of the performer play an important role in the formation of first impressions. In view of the fact that audiences are visually stimulated, it is understandable that performer appearance will affect the audiences' first impressions, both consciously and subconsciously.

Anderson (2005) maintains that the visual presentation of a performer comprises an important component of the persona. She goes on to say that a performer's presentation complements the performance in the eyes of the audience. In the classical genre, female chorus members traditionally wear black although the soloists are generally required to wear more elaborate dress (Anderson 2005: 124). It is, however, important to strike a balance to avoid focusing too much attention on appearance, as this may adversely affect the integrity of both the music and the performer. The judgements made by audiences based on appearance may, therefore, result in clothing having a psychological effect on a performer.

With regard to the formation of first impressions, Wapnick, Darrow, Kovacs and Dalrumple (1997: 471) accentuate the importance of physical attractiveness by quoting Aristotle: "Beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction". Lehmann et al. (2007: 167) maintain that, in many social settings, people make judgements about other people based on what they look like. However, research has focused on more than mere physical attractiveness by considering other factors such as dress and stage behaviour: commonly referred to as "stage presence". According to Lehmann et al. (2007: 167), Wapnick and his colleagues confirmed that how musicians take the stage is as important as the quality of their music and that performers may "win over" an audience on the basis of both their



physical appearance and their ability to convey confidence through body movements and facial expressions (Wapnick et al. 1997; Wapnick, Mazza & Darrow, 2000, in Lehmann et al. 2007: 167)

Hagberg (2003) provides a comprehensive guide to stage presence for performers. In her book, Hagberg (2003: 2) discusses multiple issues that affect stage presence. These may be grouped into four categories, namely, posture, the bow, dress and demeanour. The importance of appearance is stressed in the following statement:

... and we [the audience] become very distracted. The shoulder strap that keeps slipping down the violinist's arm, the hair that constantly falls into the pianist's face, or the short pant legs that reveal bare skin over the cellist's socks all draw attention away from the music.

Literature in the field of psychology and education confirms that one's physical appearance has an impact on the perceptions and expectations of others. In addition, Hagberg (2003: 87) confirms that a musician's physical appearance has everything to do with the portrayal of confidence and a good stage presence.

Hagberg (2003: 3) further states that looking one's best not only demonstrates respect for the audience and the music, but also for one's fellow musicians. It is also believed that implementing the principles of good stage presence may help to improve self-confidence. Although concert dress is deemed to be extremely important, Hagberg (2003: 8) warns against dressing in too revealing and flamboyant a way as the performance should not be regarded as a fashion show. Contrary to the opinion that revealing dress may be beneficial to a performer's career, Hagberg (2003) states that revealing dress merely distracts the audience.

Also included in Hagberg's comprehensive guide are dress recommendations for female performance students. For example, a formal, sleeved dress with a skirt below the knee and stockings are recommended, while a plunging neckline, very high heels and fabric that clings to the body should be avoided (Hagberg 2003: 100).

Although Griffiths (2011) made a valuable contribution to the possible psychological effects of dress, the physical effects of dress on performance were found to be more dominant

than the psychological effects. In her phenomenological study, Griffiths (2011) sought the testimonies of six female solo instrumentalists of international standing. The study used semi-structured interviews to focus on their choice of concert dress and the effects thereof on their performances (Griffiths 2011: 30).

In an interview with a violinist, Griffiths (2011: 36) discovered that different instruments have different dress requirements regarding body movements on stage. After having experienced trouble with the straps on her dress, the violinist avoided dresses with straps. Straps tended to cause the violin to constantly slip on her shoulder, thus hindering her body movements on stage. Griffiths further argues that a performer's concert dress should take into account the physical requirements of the instrument so that the performer is not physically restricted while playing the instrument.

A harpist and a cellist both reported that they avoided wearing tight skirts on stage as their legs required space to move (Griffiths 2011: 37). The security of the dress was also of great importance to the performers, as it affected their confidence to make expressive body movements. One of the violinists testified that her dress had come undone when she had bowed, impacting significantly on her expressive body movement (Griffiths 2011: 39). With reference to the various effects of dress on the body in a performance, Griffiths labels the body as an expressive tool and the prime factor in music performance. Griffiths concludes that the participants chose non-restrictive dress that enabled them to forget their dress during the performance and that was not a distraction from the musical work itself (Griffiths 2011: 43).

Griffiths (2011) further postulates that the members of the audience hear the music but they also witness the performer's appearance with regard to dress, body movements and stage behaviour. These visual features link classical music to the standards of high excellence associated with such music through a shared connection with the body (Griffiths 2011: 32).

Green (1997, cited in Griffiths 2011: 43), however, contradicts this view when stating that an increased focus on the display elements of the performance of female instrumentalists may be interpreted by the audience as a lack of commitment to inherent musical meanings.

As a result, such female instrumentalists may be less likely to be taken seriously as musicians.

## 2.6 Body image and the female classical vocalist

Flowers, Macdonald and Oakland (2014: 4), are of the opinion that visual appearance is an important aspect of musical communication and expressivity. For example, visual appearance plays a significant role in a singer's identity.

Societies' perception of the female opera star has changed dramatically over the last few years. For example, Anna Netrebko, Elina Garanca and Patrizia Ciofi are far removed from the "larger-than-life diva" we used to envisage when we thought of opera. However, Stephenson (2012: 26) found that the increasing emphasis on the physical image of opera singers has been received with disapproval by some opera outsiders. The opera industry does not have a history of being blind to image and Stephenson (2012: 26) refers to the failed first performance of Verdi's *La Traviata*. On that occasion, the composer blamed the female lead for being too old and overweight to portray the character of Violetta accurately. In interviews with opera singers, conducted by Stephenson, it emerged that the image of the "fat lady" in opera is a stereotype and is disappearing rapidly to make way for the slimmer and more attractive opera singer (Stephenson 2012: 26).

Expanding on the importance of appearance, Wapnick et al. (1997: 470) investigated whether the physical attractiveness of singers would affect judges' ratings of vocal performances. This experiment concluded that the more attractive female performers were rated higher than the less attractive female performers. However, Wapnick et al. (1997: 477) point out that attractiveness is ambiguous and they hypothesise that what a person is wearing and how the person behaves may be more influential than his or her natural physical beauty. This finding underlines the connection between the importance of dress in the formation of first impressions and the inherent quality of a performance.

Communication through clothes and the way in which females display their sexuality have undergone drastic changes through the ages. It would appear that the issue of the use of body-focused dress reveals contradicting views on whether such dress would be beneficial to female classical performers or not. Women are constantly required to conform to current

ideals of beauty, for example slenderness. Conforming to the slender ideal is also apparent on stage, as Stephenson (2012) reveals that a slender body is beneficial to the performance career of female classical vocalists. Nevertheless, dress remains an issue of great importance in view of its ability to communicate information about the wearer to onlookers.

## **2.7 Summary**

It may be concluded that the body is used as an expressive tool in the performance situation. Dress can have a profound effect on the expressivity of the body and, therefore, also on music and overall performance. It emerged from the literature review that trust and comfort in what one wears affect the quality of a performance. It would appear that no research has been conducted on the concept of body movements, stage behaviour and appearance on stage, thus leaving a gap which is open to exploration in the field. The phenomenological experiences of the meaning of concert dress in female classical vocalists have also never been explored in research.

## Chapter 3

### Research methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used in the study. In addition, I will argue in favour of a specific preference for interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The chapter will also discuss sampling, data collection and data analysis in detail. This will be followed by a brief overview of the ethical considerations adhered to in the study, as well as the validity and reliability of the research study. The chapter concludes with a summary of what has been discussed.

#### 3.2 Research design

The study aimed to qualitatively explore the intersubjective experiences of female classical vocalists with regards to the effect of concert dress on their performances through an IPA. Such an analysis involves a detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of such lived experience. These two concepts point to the joint philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of IPA in both phenomenology and hermeneutics (Willig 2010: 179).

Interpretivism originated in hermeneutics, which is the philosophical grounding of the theory and practice of interpretation and human understanding (Maree 2007: 58). In the 19th century, Friedrich Schleiermacher defined interpretivism as the art of understanding. This definition refers to the state of allowing subjectivity, which cannot be governed by formulas and rules (Beard & Gloag 2009: 77). Analysing textual data in the context of the hermeneutic tradition is based on the principle of a hermeneutic circle, which refers to the dialectic between the understanding of the text as a whole and the interpretation of its parts (Maree 2007: 101) in other words, in order to understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts and vice versa (Maree 2007: 59).

According to Willig (2010), and contrary to the nomothetic foundation of the majority of empirical psychological research, IPA focuses essentially on the particular and the individual rather than on the universal, expressing commitment to the idiographic approach. The

idiographic approach is key to IPA, as its function is to illuminate the uniqueness of general themes in the experiences of specific individuals. This gives the researcher a better understanding of key features of the general by connecting the general to the particular (Willig 2010: 183). Thus, the idiographic design's interrelationship between the particular and the universal is connected to the hermeneutic circle: in order to understand the whole one has to understand the particular and vice versa (Beard & Gloag 2009: 77).

Phenomenology is the study of our conscious experience (Beard & Gloag 2009: 149) and the way in which things appear to us through that lived experience (Willig 2010: 180). It is, therefore, essential to explore such experiences from the point of view of the participants (Smith 2003: 53). In agreeing with Smith, Willig further postulates:

For IPA, like other phenomenological approaches, there is nothing more fundamental than experience and the primary concern is uncovering/expressing/illuminating individual subjective experience. Experience is subjective because what we experience is a phenomenal rather than a direct reality.

It is, thus, evident that, from a phenomenological perspective, different people can, and do, experience what appears to be the same situation in drastically different ways (Willig 2008: 53).

In view of the fact that this study was concerned with the phenomenological, intersubjective experiences of female classical vocalists and a dress designer, IPA was the preferred research design because it explores lived experience using careful, systematic procedures, as well as displaying a commitment to developing methods appropriate for the human sciences (Smith 2003: 54; Willig 2010: 182).

### **Participants/sampling**

A small number of participants participated in the study. The size of the homogenous sample depended on the availability of individuals who fulfilled the research and sampling criteria. The research participants comprised female classical vocalists and one international dress designer.

According to the selection criteria, the participants had to be female classical vocalists with at least five years' professional experience. Six participants (three sopranos and three mezzo

sopranos) aged between 30 and 55 were interviewed. All of them had extensive experience in both opera and recital performances. The participants also included an international concert dress designer based in New York City who has extensive experience in designing concert dresses for female classical vocalists of international standing. His experience in dressing female vocalists and his perspective on the importance of concert dress, as well as the different aspects of concert dress, were particularly valuable to the study.

### **3.3 Data collection**

The participants were invited to take part in the study telephonically and via email. During the face-to-face interviews the participants were given informed consent forms which they were required to read, agree to and fill in, in order to familiarise themselves with the details of the research study. The dress designer completed the consent form online and, thereafter, provided his in-depth responses to the questions via email.

The most common method of data collection in an IPA study is the semi-structured interview (Willig 2010: 188). The interview questions that were formulated were administered to guide the course of the interview rather than to dictate it. This meant that the participants opened up unique and interesting areas of inquiry. I started the interviews by asking the participants to elaborate on their understanding of the importance of concert dress to enable me to gain an insight into their perspectives. Thereafter, I followed the interview schedule loosely. In most cases, the participants elaborated on the questions in such a way that their answers overlapped with questions that were asked later in the interview schedule. The timing of the face-to-face interviews depended on when the participants were in Pretoria, as some of them were based in other cities. Consequently, the interview process for the six female classical vocalists lasted from April to July 2013.

All the face-to-face interviews were recorded on a laptop computer in MP3 format, after which they were transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted between 24 and 73 minutes, with the average interview lasting for approximately 50 minutes. By assuming the role of data transcriber, I became extremely familiar with the data content and this proved to be very valuable during the data analysis process. During the interviews the South African female classical vocalists elaborated on their respective views on the importance of concert

dress and also on how their views had been formed through their lived experiences in performance situations throughout their careers.

As a result of the fact that the dress designer's responses were typed out and submitted via email, this process was significantly shorter than the face-to-face interviews.

### **3.4 Data analysis and data interpretation**

In an IPA study, the data analysis is an iterative, inductive process which focuses on detailed accounts in order to provide a holistic view (Willig 2010: 187). The researcher is committed to exploring the psychological world of the participants. As a result the researcher develops an interpretative relationship with the data that were collected so as to enable the researcher to make sense of the participant's lived experiences (Smith 2003: 66).

After I had transcribed the interviews I proceeded immediately to the analysis of the data. Willig (2008: 58) offers valuable guidance on the data analysis process, and proposes that the data analysis should be divided into four stages:

#### **Stage 1**

The first stage of the data analysis involved reading and re-reading the transcripts. This stage of the data analysis was completed after each interview had been transcribed. After transcription the entire interview was replayed to verify the accuracy of the transcription of the data. This stage was also vital in enabling the researcher to become submerged in the text and the responses of the interviewees. This, in turn, provided the researcher with a superior connection to the lived experiences of the participants, seeing these experiences through their eyes. The data were then inserted into a table. The table contained each superordinate theme as a heading, followed by the subordinate theme as a subheading. Where relevant, the sub-factors that had emerged in the subordinate themes were also listed in the table under the subordinate themes and numbered accordingly.

The wide-ranging and unfocused notes made during the re-reading process were vital to the interpretation process. In fact, the process of compiling notes proved to be invaluable in acquiring an interpretative perspective of the lived experiences of the participants. These



notes of my own impressions of the transcriptions were inserted into the left-hand margin of the table.

## **Stage 2**

The second stage of the data analysis involved identifying and labelling emergent themes and, thus, capturing the character of each section of the text. These emergent themes were inserted into the right-hand margin of the analysis table. The theme titles were conceptual, and reflected the essence of what was said in the text (Willig 2008: 58). **In the process of establishing emergent themes, I re-read the transcripts in order to detect possible new insights into the texts (Smith 2003: 67).** A number of psychological as well as physical concepts emerged in the established themes. Included in the psychological impacts of dress were self-awareness, body image, mental comfort and trust, while the physical aspects of dress included support and discomfort.

## **Stage 3**

The third stage of the data analysis focused on structuring the emergent themes and collating them into manageable clusters. All the established themes were listed in order to determine which of them were consistent with one another and also how they related in terms of content and meaning (Smith 2003: 70). If the themes showed consistency throughout the transcripts, they would form natural clusters. Other clusters of concepts were characterised by their hierarchical relationships to one another, for example all references to shoes, make-up and jewellery were clustered in “extraneous factors” (Willig 2008: 58). This third stage of the data analysis is crucial to establishing both superordinate themes and subordinate themes.

## **Stage 4**

The fourth stage of the data analysis involved compiling a summarised table of the structured superordinate themes and their subordinate themes. This table included the respective raw data quotation pertaining to each theme, thus illustrating the established theme as well as its respective subordinate theme.

### **3.5 Write up of the data analysis**

The write-up stage of the data analysis involved translating the themes in the table into narrative text. In this stage the narrative reassumes its expansive stance in which the themes are illustrated and explained. These narrative arguments were presented together with their verbatim quotations from the transcripts to support the themes (Smith 2003: 76). The analysis chapter was structured according to the superordinate themes, summarising my interpretation of the participants' perspective. The subordinate themes were discussed according to the sequence in which they appeared in the table of superordinate and subordinate themes.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

The ethical procedures stipulated by the University of Pretoria were strictly adhered to in the study. Upon agreeing to participate in the research project, each participant was required to fill in and sign a participant consent form. The signing of the informed consent form affirmed that the participants understood that their participation in the study was completely anonymous and voluntary. They also understood that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to them.

The informed consent form also stated that the data collected from them was for academic research purposes only, and that it would be stored in the University of Pretoria Music Department for a period of 15 years in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University.

## Chapter 4

### Research results and analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the IPA analysis of the data collected from the transcribed interviews. The female classical vocalists were encouraged to discuss their experiences of the role of concert dress in their performances in as much detail as possible as this ensured rich and saturated data. The designer was also encouraged to elaborate on his experiences of designing concert dresses for world-renown female classical vocalists, thus providing a comprehensive view of the individual as well as the universal requirements of concert dress. The data analysis resulted in the compilation of a list of five superordinate themes, which were discussed in terms of 21 subordinate themes. Each section of the chapter presents a superordinate theme, the subordinate themes that underpin the superordinate theme, and a raw data quotation which supports the subordinate theme. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the chapter content.

#### 4.2 Identifying superordinate and subordinate themes

Five superordinate themes and 21 subordinate themes emerged from the data which was collated from the transcribed interviews. Twenty-nine subcategories emerged under the subordinate themes. These categories will be discussed later. Each of the tables present each of the five superordinate themes, the respective subordinate themes that underpin the superordinate themes, and raw data quotations selected from the transcripts to support the subordinate themes. The superordinate themes include audience, empowerment through dress, personal style, inhibiting factors of dress and criteria for the selection of dress.

##### **Superordinate theme 1: Audience**

The audience comprises an integral aspect of any performance. Without an audience, there would be no performance. The audience was, therefore, an important topic of discussion during the data collection process with the participants sharing their experiences as audience members themselves as well as their perspectives on what they thought the audience should think or feel.

**Table 1: Superordinate theme 1: Audience, subordinate themes and raw data themes**

Superordinate theme 1: Audience	
Subordinate theme	Raw data themes
<b>1. Perceptions</b>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> ... sometimes an elaborate dress has the same effect as a fabulous high C, even though the rest of the aria was not great.
<b>2. Dress and audience entertainment</b>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> ... I think it enhances something for certain members of the public ...
<b>3. Audience distraction/discomfort</b>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ...and see through and things like that is just ... I don't think it works on stage, it just distracts ...

### Subordinate theme 1: Perceptions

It emerged that audience perception was of particular importance to the participants as it has a significant effect on their selection of concert dress. The dress designer stated that dress should never overshadow the performance. However, it should have an initial elevating effect on both performer and performance but, after that, the essence of the music should become the focal point of the performance. This is linked to the discussion in previous section on the prominent role of both the music and the text in a performance.

**Designer:** The singer is there to tell the audience a story with a song or aria. Especially when she is starting her career, the artist needs them to listen to her more than to look at her...

In the excerpts below the participants indicated that certain types of dress, for example, body-focused dress or flamboyant dress, have such a significant impact on audience perception that they could create a particular impression (accurate or inaccurate) about the ability of the performer:

**Vocalist B:** But, very often, the people who display their bodies so much don't have that much of a technique, singing wise. I find that's ... normally the case ... .

**Vocalist D:** I think that audiences are fickle ... uhm ... in the same sense, and I think it [dress] has the same effect as ... and don't get me wrong, I love audiences, uhm ... and I've often been an audience member, and some of my best friends are

audience members ... [Laughing]. But, you know, sometimes an elaborate dress has the same effect as a fabulous high C, even though the rest of the aria was not great.

The following statements referred to the effect of dress on perceptions in general. The statements revealed that good grooming is regarded a sign of both politeness and respect:

**Vocalist B:** I think so, ja, I think people will think that you are more professional if you are well groomed for the occasion. I do think so, because people do that in all professions. I mean, we all know that if you go for an interview for a job, and you look a certain way, and people see you for the first time, they summarise you when you walk in, hulle het nie baie tyd om oor jou te wonder nie (*they don't have much time to form an opinion on your character*), they see you for half an hour, en dan loop jy weer (*and then you leave again*). [...] it tells them how you think about them. How you thought about them before you entered. Het jy gedink jy gaan vir hulle dit aantrek (*you had thought of wearing your outfit for them*), because this shows who I am ...? So it is impossible to say that it is ... no, I think ... yes, it does.

**Vocalist F:** Rather overdress than underdress. Always. Never, ever set your foot on stage in tekkies [trainers] and jeans. Not even in an opera school setup in performance class. The better you dress, the more respect it conveys ... the better the impression. [...] I think it's the utmost form of respect and gratitude that you can portray to an audience if you present yourself in the best way possible.

Dress also has a significant effect on the expectations arising from the initial visual impact. Some audience members form an opinion about what they think the performance is going to sound like based on their initial impression of the performer's dress:

**Vocalist B:** It [dress] has an enormous impact, because I know, as an audience member, when somebody enters the stage, you already think ... "oh, ek dink dit gaan so klink ..." (*I think that this performance will sound like that*).

**Vocalist A:** I ... as an audience member, when I sit in an audience and someone walks in with a beautiful ball gown, you expect the programme to just ... Go with it.

**Vocalist D:** ... if I'm sitting in the audience and someone comes on [the stage] wearing a dress that I think is horrible, that's communicating to me, it's communicating that my taste and the singer's taste is not the same. So, by then, I hope that the performance is going to overcome the dress ...

**Vocalist F:** ... to make yourself extremely presentable to your audience who, of course, have been paying for tickets, not only to hear, but also to see ... a visual as well. [...] absolutely, it's a pivotal role. The audience sees the singer, or the individual on stage ... entering the stage arena, so to speak ... way before you open your mouth and start to sing.

As indicated in the following excerpt, audience perceptions may even be influenced by concert dress to such an extent that the audience members form an opinion about the performer's social standing,:

**Vocalist B:** En dan dink hulle “ooh, die meisie is seker n bietjie arm, haar rok is seker by die huis gemaak”, (*the audience starts assuming that the girl must be poor because the dress looked home-made*).

The dress designer made the following interesting statement referring to the perceptions of concert dress of different nationalities and societies. There is a link between this issue of nationalities and the discussion later on the effect of social norms on the selection of concert dress:

**Designer:** Through the ages singers dressed to suit themselves on stage. I don't think there is a great trend for stage gowns. European singers tend to dress down more for the stage than American or Russian singers do. When a singer is appearing in Vienna she should keep this in mind. If she walks on stage in a diva gown -- even if she is a diva -- it can be in poor taste. I know that some of my German friends find American singers' gowns much to [sic] glamorous, even some gowns I have designed.

Enhanced audience expectation from a visual perspective may be the result of societies being more visually stimulated (see excerpts below):

**Vocalist A:** I think it's what the audience... maybe nowadays they are more visually in tune than they were before, and... they deserve to be.

**Vocalist F:** We live in a very visually stimulated society. And it is not decreasing, it is getting worse by the day, and it does have its positive advantages to the extent that visual aspects of singers, opera singers, recitalists... uhm... the standards expected by audiences are so much higher.

## **Subordinate theme 2: Dress and audience entertainment**

As discussed in the previous section, audiences today are more visually stimulated than they were in previous times. The aim of a performance is to entertain the audience and, as dress as a visual aspect of performance, it forms an important part of that entertainment. In accordance, Vocalist C made the following comment on dress and audience entertainment:

**Vocalist C:** ... in my view ... the main ... function of dressing prettily, and doing your make up and your hair and everything, is to ... to ... make this part of an experience [...] And yes, it [dress] does add ... I think to the audience ... uhm ... whether I like it or not, it does add to their enjoyment, I think. If you perform well anyway.

The following participants referred to the effect of dress changes on communication and audience entertainment:

**Vocalist D:** If you've got time, and it's necessary ... I think it enhances something for certain members of the public, I think ... if you change [dress].

**Vocalist E:** Yes! And it gives you a total different feel of the concert and of the programme. But, these days, we can only afford one dress, so if you get sponsored a dress, it would be nice to do [laughing]. It's fun for the audience and it's fun for you... then you feel the lightness of your programme in the second half, if your second half is much lighter.

It is, thus, clear that dress has an effect on audience entertainment. In addition, indicating to an audience that a performer made an effort to look presentable for the audience may be interpreted as a sign of politeness.

### **Subordinate theme 3: Audience distraction/discomfort**

Although dress may have a positive effect on the perceptions of the audience, it also has the potential to distract the audience and engender discomfort. The following participant responses indicated the possible negative effect of concert dress on the audience.

**Designer:** What any GREAT singer wants is to avoid any gown that distracts from her performance. She is an artist who will be on stage in order to interpret a composer's work. Nothing should come between the audience's attention and the music.

**Vocalist F:** Everything a singer does must pinpoint the focus on the music. If you, as a singer, dress or behave in such a way that you distract from the music, you will lose your integrity.

**Vocalist B:** ..if somebody comes on in a dress that looks too tight, and it's not good, well fitting, partykeer is die sommer so kak, en dan trek die nate so ... party het sulke homemade taffeta stuff, en dan trek daai naat in die middel so, dit is ... *(sometimes the home-made taffeta numbers will show seams and hems that are unflattering, which are ... Horrendous, because people end up looking at that).*

The participants cited below also expressed the view that ill-fitting and over-revealing dress is a definite cause of audience distraction.

**Vocalist E:** But I would say that it doesn't look well on stage, uhm ... when that dress is so low ... that that is all people notice all the time, and it goes past the music, it goes past the voice, and it detracts totally from the performance.

**Vocalist F:** Clothing the parts that should be clothed ... tastefully, in attire that is not too revealing, that is too see-through, or like you said earlier, that is too tight. It is just as bad. It's really distasteful. Anything ... that would distract the audience to such an extent that they cannot hear the music anymore. [...] I would [feel exposed in revealing dress]. And I think your audience would also experience mental discomfort. For me, it's not only about ... you see, the energy that a singer carries within her is automatically transferred to the audience, and that ... they pick it up.

**Vocalist C:** ... if you have a dress which is so low cut that the only thing that people look at are your boobs, and wondering when they are going to fall out ... then it's distracting, you know ...? Or ... if the dress is cut so high, that ... people are just waiting for that moment when... it just open a little more, and they see [laughing] everything, or whatever it is ... [laughing].

**Designer:** If a dress is too tight it will show every movement when the singer breathes and it will also show the movement of the diaphragm while she is singing. She should make sure the gown is not skin tight to avoid this problem. While breathing in, the singer should not remind the audience of a balloon being blown up. This can be the effect if the gown is too tight.

It emerged from the data collected that the issue of audience perception was of particular importance with all the participants referring to it. They were also unanimous about its importance.

## **Superordinate theme 2: Empowerment through dress**

The data analysis revealed that the participants experienced empowerment through dress on two different levels, namely, psychological and physical. The following table (Table 4.2) summarises the subthemes and sub factors that emerged in the data analysis and that pertained to both psychological and physical empowerment through dress.

### **Table 2: Superordinate theme 2: Empowerment through dress, subordinate themes, subcategories and raw data themes**



Superordinate theme 2: Empowerment through dress	
Subordinate theme 1: Psychological	
Subcategories	Raw data themes
1.1. Confidence	<b>Vocalist B:</b> ...and enter a stage with confidence ...
1.2. Body image	<b>Vocalist D:</b> The more I can hide, the better ...
1.3. Mental comfort	<b>Vocalist C:</b> it [mental comfort] is absolutely essential
1.4. Stage behaviour: persona and demeanour	<b>Vocalist D:</b> So, yes, I certainly think it does [affect stage behaviour].
Subordinate theme 2: Physical	
Subcategories	Raw data themes
2.1. Positive effect on singing technique	<b>Vocalist F:</b> if you sing with a very good corset, definitely it will help with the support ...
2.2. Physical comfort	<b>Vocalist C:</b> ... make sure your dress is comfortable ...
2.3. Freedom of movement	<b>Designer:</b> ... Sitting in a gown or in a pair of jeans are two different things.

### Subordinate theme 1: Psychological factors

The sub factors that underpinned psychological empowerment through dress included confidence, body image, mental comfort and stage behaviour (persona and demeanour). All of the above were factors that pointed to psychological empowerment: an issue that was immensely important to all the participants.

#### **Confidence**

The participants all indicated the need for psychological empowerment through dress. If the participants were completely at ease with what they were wearing during a concert performance, this would have a positive effect on both their confidence and their performance.

**Vocalist E:** Well, I think it just brings out the confidence [...] It gives you that extra bit of confidence, I mean, we all know get nervous if we have to perform; some get less nervous, but everybody gets nervous and, I think, just looking at yourself in the

mirror that moment before you go onto stage, composing yourself, and seeing that you look well, it elevates you into a different dimension, or not dimension, actually, but onto a different level. It's just that extra boost.

**Vocalist C:** Because so many performers feel more self-confident ... they feel better when they walk on stage ... looking beautiful, it carries over to the audience, and what it is that they do.

**Vocalist D:** ... it's not going to improve the passion with which you sing unless your confidence is improved by it [dress] [...] If it improves confidence. I've seen a number of singers who are really very good, technically, musically very good, but lacking in confidence. And, sometimes... a dress will enhance the confidence which will enhance the performance, but I don't think that it can enhance it [the performance] in any other way.

**Vocalist F:** Your self-confidence can be enhanced by dress, definitely. Especially if the singer does not have a lot of experience as yet on stage. And it will definitely aid with self-image and self-confidence.

**Designer:** If she feels beautiful she will perform better. This is a given. A singer owes it to herself to look her best when she walks out on the stage.

### ***Body image***

It became apparent that the body image of vocalists was of particular importance to the performance. All the participants agreed that dress had a significant effect on body image, especially within the performance situation.

**Vocalist D:** The more I can hide, the better. [...] I think if you ... feel good about yourself, bearing in mind that other people are going to be looking at you as you perform, it does make it easier to perform successfully.

**Vocalist B:** Well, body image should begin with a dress that fits properly. So that will also set the audience at ease because there is nothing as bad as an ill-fitting dress [...] your body image will not be good if you stand on stage, knowing that something is showing, or something might slip off [that should] not slip off ... ja.

**Designer:** It is more important that the performer feel good about her body rather than concern herself with her size...

One participant also highlighted the importance of looking good from all angles as most performers are concerned only with looking good from the front.

**Vocalist B:** Uhm ... it is good to look good from the front. It is very important to look good from the side, because that's the way you enter, and you must feel that you

can do it confidently, that you like what you see so everybody else will like what they see as well. [...] But the very important thing is that you must look good from the back. Because nobody reverses off the stage.

### ***Mental comfort***

All the participants also highlighted the importance of mental comfort in a performance as a lack of mental comfort may lead to unwanted distractions. In addition, being able to forget about the dress during a performance was also extremely important. In addition to being comfortable it was also important to have confidence in the concert dress.

**Vocalist A:** ... the dress shouldn't be anywhere in your mind ... you should only be able to focus on the singing. [...] If your dress fits well, it doesn't bulge anywhere, you're not afraid that something's going to slip off, being ... mentally, you're not thinking about your dress, that's actually ideal.

**Vocalist B:** ... "mental comfort" can only set in if you paid enough attention to the preparation of the clothing, so that when you are there, you know you look good.

**Vocalist C:** ... it [mental comfort] is absolutely essential, because ... [it's] almost all ... I believe you have to be concerned with on stage, is ... the words and the music and how those two ... interact with one another ... and ... what it means ...

In the following excerpt one of the participants highlighted the importance of trust in a concert dress by comparing dress to a good accompanist.

**Vocalist D:** ... a great accompanist will always find you, they will be there, they will support you, they will understand, they will notice that you are running out of air, perhaps. It happens to all of us. And I think your concert dress should be the same, you should know how it fits, where it fits, how to get it on, how to get it off, where to change it ... Uhm ... the fact that it's not going to hook onto your heel, when you walk onto stage [...] I think you need to be able to trust your dress like you trust your accompanist.

**Vocalist B:** ... the one thing that you must know, is that the dress will not move.

### ***Stage behaviour, persona and demeanour***

As revealed in the following raw data quotations, the effect of dress on stage behaviour, persona and demeanour was an important topic in respect of psychological empowerment through dress.

**Vocalist F:** A dress can be the best asset a singer has. Even the accessories in your hair ... the jewellery that you wear, the ... detail on the dress ... everything can be used. A singer can use body language, to use the detail on the dress to portray, to help her to interpret whatever she is singing.

**Vocalist D:** But I think it does, I think if you are wearing something slightly more masculine, it does give you the freedom to, perhaps, change the way you walk slightly, to change your stride, whereas it's going to look odd ... in a dress [...]. So, yes, I certainly think it does [affect stage behaviour].

**Vocalist B:** Uhm, you sing how you feel. So you cannot not dress that way because a singer is a person and a picture ... but also to yourself. So, as jy nou ooploop, jy sien (*the moment you walk on stage*), you must already become ... uhm ... the music.

**Vocalist D:** And I think it's [a different persona due to dress] definitely there [...] And ... uhm ... so I think ... for some singers when they go onto stage, even just in concert performances ... or I mustn't use the word just because it is just as important as an opera, but even in concert performances they take on a character. And if it [dress] assists you to do that and that [dress] assists you in giving a better performance ... sure!

One participant elaborated on the effect of dress on her stage behaviour. She described her experience of psychological empowerment through dress. In this excerpt below she discussed how the development of a French Art Song recital had been assisted by the use of dress in characterisations.

**Vocalist B:** So I could, for the beginning songs, I had a very subdued, sort of an intro and ... baie demure. Min handbeweginkies (*small hand movements*), net so hier en daar n voetjie beweeg (*just here and there a foot moves*), you know, very elegant, understated, ballet-like. And then, when I came to the more wild and sexy, almost more cabaret-styled French stuff, I could move and even almost twirl in the dress, but I practised it. And I saw how the dress fell. En ek kon dit seductive maak (*and I could make it seductive*), and I could actually interpret songs, die mense was flippen ... van hulle koppe af daaroor (*the people were off their heads*) [...] because you could do almost anything and I wore the same dress throughout the entire performance, but it became anything I wanted it to. But you could see it in the cut from the beginning, so I chose ... and hy was nie foot length nie (*it was not foot length*), hy was (*it was*) so ... ankle length, jy weet (*you know*), soos n ballerina length. [...] En ek kon hom ook vou, oor my as ek wou. Jy weet, ek kon so beweeg, en iets iets met my arms doen (*and I could fold it around me if I wanted to, you know, I could move, and I could do movements with my arms*). And then ... but nothing creased, nothing moved, it was a fantastic performance.

The following participant expressed a strong opinion about the effect of dress on demeanour and the ways in which it may assist in a successful portrayal of a character.

**Designer:** Most singers know [sic] when they look good; it shows in their demeanor [sic], gait and bearing. I think the way a singer is dressed gives her that extra bit of confidence -- or lack thereof.

The participants were divided in their opinions about whether dress affected the quality of a performance with some maintaining that it did, indeed, affect the quality of a performance and others expressing the view that they did not feel that dress had an enhancing effect on performance. The participants quoted below all indicated that dress could affect the quality of a performance.

**Vocalist B:** But she sang fantastically, so I remember the singing with the dress. Uhm ... no ... I think it can contribute to the performance, in terms of enhancing ...

**Vocalist F:** The effect of dress ... I would go so far as to say that it can make or break a performance.

**Vocalist D:** And if you are feeling uncomfortable, if you feel that you don't look as you should, I think it would have a profound effect on the inherent quality of your performance.

The quotations below illustrate the views of those participants who maintained that dress could not have an effect on the quality of performance. It also appeared that some of the participants had mixed feelings about the effects of dress on the quality of the performance as they had expressed different views about the topic as the interviews had progressed.

**Vocalist B:** Well, it won't make you sing better, that's for sure. It might enhance the quality of the performance from the perceiver's eye, en iemand sal se "dit was n fantastiese rok" (*and someone will say "it was a fantastic dress"*), you know ...

**Vocalist D:** It's not going to help to improve your technique, it's not going to improve your musicality, it's not going to improve your legato line, and it's not going to improve the passion with which you sing, unless your confidence is improved by it.

**Vocalist F:** No, not really. The quality of a performance ... lies in the preparation of the singer. The quality of the performance lies in the integrity in portrayal of the music for the audience.

**Designer:** ... I once met Barbara Matera who was the most famous costumier in the USA. [...] I was amazed to see how much work went into these costumes with hand embroidered flowers and lace appliqués which took hours of work to complete. I asked her why they spent all this time and money for something that would not register beyond the first few rows of the theatre. Her answer was to help the actor

or singer to perform their best. The actor will know it is real fur that edges the coat and not a cheap imitation. This way, he carries himself differently and looks more regal.

The above excerpts revealed that the dress may, in some cases, affect the quality of a performance and have an enhancing effect. However, this is only true if a performer already possesses the necessary performance skills. As confirmed by vocalist B, if a performer has no performance skills whatsoever, dress would not have an enhancing effect on the performance:

**Vocalist B:** ... maar as jy lelik sing ... maak die rok nie veel verskil nie ... [*if you sing badly, the dress will not make any difference*]

Thus, the analysis suggests that dress does indeed have an effect on the feeling of psychological empowerment in performance. The psychological empowerment ranged from not being aware of dress (mental comfort) to being aware of dress in the sense that dress could enhance the performance in terms of stage behaviour.

## **Subordinate theme 2: Physical empowerment through dress**

In this section the participants expressed their feelings about the importance of being physically empowered through dress. Physical comfort and the positive effect it has on singing technique and freedom of movement were themes that were extremely important to the participants.

### ***Physical comfort***

The participants expressed strong opinions on the importance of physical comfort with comfort being a main requirement of concert dress.

**Vocalist E:** ... you have to feel comfortable, so you don't need any restrictions from your clothes when you sing [...] I think it's very important that you have to be comfortable in what you wear.

**Vocalist A:** I think it's ... from the moment you walk on [stage], you have to be comfortable ...

**Vocalist C:** I, once again, have to come back to comfort. It is extremely important to me nowadays, to ... and it's been for quite a while, to go on stage and be comfortable.

**Vocalist D:** I find it empowering in the sense that ... as long as it makes me feel confident, comfortable, and I don't have to worry about it. That is empowering enough.

### ***Positive effect on singing technique***

Most of the participants indicated that they generally avoided garments that were tight around the waist, for example, a corset. Vocalist F and the designer were the only participants who expressed a different view of tight garments:

**Designer:** A costume designer once told me that Joan Sutherland's waist expanded seven inches when she took a breath, so her gowns had to be loose fitting and comfortable. Marita Napier, the South African soprano, preferred a boned bustier in her gown as that would help her support the voice. Her gowns could never be tight enough. This differs from singer to singer and they will guide the designer.

**Vocalist F:** if you sing with a very good corset, definitely it will help with the support, providing that it's not too tight. I think the old singer [a certain singer], also firmly believed in a nice, firm corset, and of course more space on top, for ample breathing space, but it definitely helps with breathing. [...] If you wear a very nice corset that is so good ... and so well designed, that also helps with the posture...

### ***Freedom of movement***

The following statement by the designer underlined the importance of freedom of movement. It is, clearly, advisable to be used to your dress:

**Designer:** Sitting in a gown or in a pair of jeans are two different things.

**Vocalist B:** Then, for instance, something might look very nice when you are standing still, but then when you do something passionate, dan mag daar dalk iets oopval, of iets mag dalk afval of wat ookal (*then something might fall open, or something might fall out, or whatever*)...

In the section on freedom of movement the importance of practising in a dress was emphasised. Freedom of movement or the lack thereof could have an impact on the performance as a whole, especially as a lack of freedom has the potential to hinder both body movements and expressivity on stage.

### Superordinate theme 3: Personal style

In this section the importance of personal style in concert dress is discussed. Themes that underpin this subject include upbringing, personal preference/individuality, social norms, training and guidance. These will be discussed in detail.

**Table 3: Superordinate theme 3: Personal style, subordinate themes and raw data themes**

Superordinate themes 3: Personal style	
Subordinate theme	Raw data themes
1. Upbringing	<b>Vocalist C:</b> ... Maybe it's the way I was raised, I don't know, but not only that, it's just ... well ... it's just me ...
2. Personal preference/individuality	<b>Vocalist F:</b> ... Yes, absolutely, but I think it's [dress] a very personal thing ...
3. Social norms	<b>Vocalist D:</b> ... I need to be appropriately dressed for wherever I am. So it's my view of social norms.
4. Training	<b>Vocalist C:</b> ... and I believe that there should be at least a moment where you do talk about these things [dress] ...
5. Guidance	<b>Vocalist C:</b> That has always ... after ... more than thirty years, it still stayed with me, as you can hear now.

#### Subordinate theme 1: Upbringing

The themes discussed in this section include quotations from participants whose upbringing has influenced the way in which they perceive the importance of appearance and concert dress in particular.

**Vocalist B:** I can tell you what my dad taught us, even when you don't sing. He was very, very fastidious about how we looked [...] My dad taught us to look ... how we looked from the back in the mirror before we left the house. [...] I think we were taught so well, that it had to be well planned and chosen [...] I was brought up to pay so much attention to it [...] To be so aware of how I chose it. And I never wore anything that was too small for me, or ... that I couldn't breathe, or ... I felt ... dat daar iets gaan afslip, en ek moet dit die heelyd optrek (*that something would slip off and I have to pull it up the whole time*). No, I can't really think of a time that it happened.



**Vocalist C:** Generally, superficial things ... and I think clothing is wonderful and beautiful, but superficial ... don't necessarily have much of an effect on ... my behaviour. [...] Maybe it's the way I was raised, I don't know, but not only that, it's just ... well ... it's just me.

**Vocalist A:** Maybe it's just the way you're brought up. I ... I haven't sung in a different culture or in a different country really, where ... it's different from what we believe.

Thus, the analysis revealed that upbringing exerts an influence on the perception of the importance of concert dress.

### **Subordinate theme 2: Personal preference and individuality**

The participants expressed contrasting views in respect of personal preference and individuality.

**Designer:** I think any person - not only a performer - uses dress as an expression of her personality and style. When a singer is appearing in a concert or recital she has more leeway than she does in an opera to project her personality on stage.

It was particularly interesting to note that the designer was cautious when designing dress to suit the repertoire of a programme as concert dress has the potential to turn into costume. Thus, the performer runs the risk of being 'overpowered' by the dress in the way in which the dress may overshadow the individuality of the performer.

**Designer:** The first gown I designed for Susan Graham was for a recital of French Songs at Carnegie Hall. They were mostly romantic songs and she wanted the gown to reflect that. When she sang *Scheherezade* in the Albert Hall in London some time later, we used the Arabian nights as inspiration and dressed her accordingly. I am not keen on doing this too often, but because Ms. Graham has such a strong personality, she can carry it off beautifully and her gown does not become a costume.

Similar views were shared by the following participants:

**Vocalist C:** Within that [concert dress], there's huge scope, to be yourself, or to let your own personality shine through your dress.

**Vocalist F:** I think the title of your programme would already set the boundaries clearly there. If you have a paying audience coming to see a full scale *Traviata* or *Lucia* or *Carmen*, they know what to expect. That would be costume-orientated dress. If an audience goes to see you, as a solo singer in a recital of your own, your

name would be first on the poster, and then the title of your concert, or whichever way that you would prefer it, they would expect to see you.

There were also participants who felt that the repertoire itself should be represented by the concert dress, but with a certain element of personal style although the importance of the personal style was secondary to that of the repertoire.

**Vocalist A:** I think it should be a mix of the two.

**Vocalist B:** Jou personal style is nie so belangrik nie, dis nie 'n fashion statement nie. (*Your personal style is not as important, it's not a fashion statement*)

**Vocalist E:** Yes, I think it's the happy medium between the two [personal style and adherence to repertoire] of them. Personal style... if you look well in black all the time, then wear black. If you look well in a mini skirt, fine, but you are not going to wear a mini skirt on the stage.

**Vocalist D:** You only wear it in a concert, to a very fancy party and a fancy dress party. So in other words [laughing], it's a costume. Of a sort. Uhm ... it's a very specifically chosen costume and it's a very personal costume, unlike the costuming for opera ...

The importance of personal preference and individuality in concert dress was expressed in the following statements:

**Vocalist B:** So you must take care to do that because, if you come up in a dress that somebody bought you, and you don't like it much; it's not you, you give totally the wrong impression and dit beneuk [hinders] die performance because it contradicts the performance.

**Vocalist E:** I personally like sleeves because of the build of my body, I know my body and I know the good parts of my body and I know the worst parts of my body and the shape of my body.

Thus, according to the data collected, personal style and individuality are as important as the musical content (lyrics and musical style) reflected in concert dress. Thus, there should be a balance between the two factors so that the one does not overpower the other.

### **Subordinate theme 3: Social norms**

Most of the participants did not feel that social norms had much of an impact on the selection of concert dress as none of them dressed in a manner that would challenge social norms.

**Vocalist D:** Only in as far as I feel that I need to be appropriately dressed for wherever I am. So it's my view of social norms. So I will dress according to what I think the occasion is, and ... "the poshness level" [sic] or the poshness index [sic] [laughing] of the occasion. Uhm ... and again, I think it comes to ... appropriateness. And, I mean, we all have different views of appropriateness.

Although social norms were not generally taken into account by most of the participants, appropriateness did emerge as a factor in the discussion on social norms.

### **Subordinate theme 4: Training**

Training had clearly played a major role in some of the participants' perception of concert dress. However, others had not received any guidance on the matter whatsoever and, as expressed by vocalists A and D, they had had to rely on their instinct and experience as performers to dress appropriately:

**Vocalist A:** Not really trained, no, I think it's more experience as you... as you develop as a singer. I had male teachers, so they didn't really give me any "tips" [sic] in dressing.

**Vocalist D:** You know, my training was so long ago, I can't remember what I thought before [laughing]. I don't know, I think my opinion is something that's evolved over the years...

The following responses are from participants whose training had made a significant difference to their opinions of the importance of dress and appearance on stage.

**Vocalist E:** Yes. Definitely, it goes hand in hand [guidance on dress and the effect thereof on performance career]. [...] Yes, through the years ... people would say ... "that's a nice dress, and you look nice, but I think the colour was a bit ... you know", usually in a positive way, never screaming at me, or that kind of thing. But, uhm ... no, I think it's very important. Singing is such a personal thing ... and the bond that you build up with your teacher ... and I think the freedom that your teacher ... by observing you as an individual, can influence your dress in a good manner. Because your teacher should never impose her or his ideas exactly ... like "because it didn't

work for me, it won't work for you". Respect every individual, but you [as a teacher] can guide.

**Vocalist B:** Ja, baie (*yes, often*), we were told how to dress. [...] Ja, in singing training, we had a very strict ... in Stellenbosch, we had a very strict professor, and he shat [sic] on us about our shoes [...] And, uhm ... we were taught that ... that the toes have to be closed, and that you have to wear stockings. [...]. And, ja, we were also trained ... and taught ... and told ... never to wear anything with a too open back, a too revealing back, or a too revealing front, or a too revealing anything. En niks wat strapless is nie (*and nothing strapless*), because it always drops ... of dit pof uit (*or puffs out*) ...

**Vocalist C:** ... when I was in my first year, or second, third year, when he was still mister [other professor], [laughing] ... which sounds strange nowadays ... we had chamber music with him, and he ... it was the thing he stressed most of all, and I think it's absolutely fabulous that that was imprinted in my mind at a young age, and ... [he would stress] Comfort. On stage. [...] He would ... he always said: you should never go on stage with a new dress, if you haven't really tried that dress out, and sung in it [...] That has always ... after ... more than thirty years, it still stayed with me, as you can hear now. I mean, that was part of the training. And he was probably the only person who ever ...

It may be concluded from the excerpts above that training had a significant and lasting effect on the participants' view of concert dress and appearance on stage. As revealed in the following excerpt one of the participants stated that her opinion of concert dress had been strongly influenced by her ballet training and not her vocal training:

**Vocalist F:** ... Uhm, I would not say my vocal training, as such, but definitely the ballet. Definitely the ballet background ... in an innate sense of being immaculately dressed to perfection, as far as possible. Hairstyle, cleanliness, the whole look, everything must be absolutely perfect on stage. You do not go onto stage if you look like you have just climbed out of the dishwasher.

### **Subordinate theme 5: Guidance**

This section discusses the issue of the guidance that may be given to new performers as regards concert dress. The following quotations illustrate that the importance of concert dress is often underestimated. As a result of the fact that vocal training is the primary concern in becoming a performer, teachers often forget about the other aspects that also form part of a performance, including dress.

**Vocalist C:** Sometimes you are so busy with vocal training that you actually forget about that ... me, anyway [...] and I believe that there should be at least a moment where you do talk about these things [dress] ... like in the exams now, for example, one of my students ... arrived at the exam ... in a ... short mini dress. And I saw her before I went in, and I said: “Is this what you are going to sing in?” And she said: “Yes, what’s wrong with that?” You know, so ... and then you realise that ... at least it’s when they are doing an exam, and then you can see it and you can address the problem. [...] But a lot of people do need teaching. And I sometimes forget that. It’s important to look good and I believe, elegant on stage.

**Vocalist D:** And I think not enough attention is paid to it, I think singers work so hard on technique and learning repertoire and “oh, \*fah! What fah am I?” [Laughing], and, you know, that not enough attention is often paid to “Who am I when I am on stage” and “Who am I?” What I wear is part of who I am.

**Vocalist B:** I would say that it [dress] is as important as any other part of your technique that you are mastering as you are growing into your career.

The analysis suggests that teachers do not pay enough attention to the importance of dress and appearance on stage. One participant went so far as to suggest that, as dress and appearance are such an integral part of a performance, there should be a course developed on appropriate dress in performance training.

**Vocalist B:** ... we actually had a long talk about it once, that we were going to give classes ... in concert dress. Because [someone else], and other people were so unhappy about how the people looked at competitions and so on. So ons wou al eintlik n kursus ge-design het daarvoor (*so we wanted to design a course for it*). I just never got around to it. We talked about it at performance classes.

The participants made the following statements about general guidance and advice with regards to concert dress.

**Designer:** Once the music starts, she must forget about the gown and not pull at it nor tuck on it. [...] I suggest leaving such minor annoyances alone and fixing them while backstage and out of the public eye. I cannot stress this enough. A great artist knows that it is about the music and not about her persona or dress.

**Vocalist E:** I personally think when you start fitting a dress, and before you actually perform in it, walk around in it, and... breathe in it. And just do a scale or two before you... especially if the dress is made for you. [...]I personally don’t like it [high heels], and I don’t advise my students to come to lessons in high heels. Just a very good, comfortable heel, so you feel properly grounded.

**Designer:** Practise sitting down in a gown as well, especially in a full skirted gown which has to be lifted onto the chair.

#### Superordinate theme 4: Inhibiting factors of dress

The data suggested that guidance in respect of concert dress is an essential part of performance training and that it is often underestimated. A general awareness of concert dress is important as a performance is, after all, an audio-visual experience.

The following section elaborates on the superordinate theme of inhibiting factors of dress, and the effects thereof on the performer as well as on the performance. It was clear that concert dress could result in a negative performance experience and that this should be avoided at all cost. There were four superordinate themes in this category (Table 4.4).

**Table 4: Superordinate theme 4: Inhibiting factors of dress, subordinate themes and raw data themes**

Superordinate theme 4: Inhibiting factors of dress	
Subordinate themes	Raw data themes
<b>1. Over-revealing dress</b>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ... so I know you feel uncomfortable when a dress is too tight, or ... sort of showing too much cleavage.
<b>2. Performance experience and hiding discomfort</b>	<b>Vocalist E:</b> ... I think for a young singer, it's [restrictive dress] devastating ...
<b>3. Performer distraction</b>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ... because you're already focused on something else ...
<i>3.1. Performer discomfort</i>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ... so I know you feel uncomfortable when a dress is too tight, or ... sort of showing too much cleavage...
<i>3.2. Ill fit</i>	<b>Vocalist F:</b> The bodice was just an ill-fitting disaster, it kept wanting to slide off ...
<b>4. Lasting effect of wardrobe malfunction</b>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> There is an example: it was one of the first international singing competitions, and there was a Russian singer with a dress that started to slide [down]. And what do you do? You're on stage!

### **Subordinate theme 1: Over-revealing dress**

All the participants agreed that an over-revealing dress was ill-advised and should, in fact, be avoided at all cost because it diverts the attention and focus of the audience from the performance.

**Vocalist F:** Ja, ja ... something that's too low cut [should be avoided]. That's always too risqué and it's always a risk ... uhm ... Especially if you have a programme with a lot of movement. It is never attractive. Something that is too ... see-through ... too revealing, too short ...

**Vocalist A:** ... so I know you feel uncomfortable when a dress is too tight, or ... sort of showing too much cleavage [laughing] it makes you uncomfortable

**Vocalist C:** And I've had a dress in the past which just ... I had the dress made, and it was cut extremely low. And ... I tried not to, but I couldn't help uhm ... thinking of this ... constantly. While I was on stage.

### **Subordinate theme 2: Performance experience and hiding discomfort**

Performance experience clearly played a role in managing or hiding discomfort and yet still maintaining the quality of the performance.

**Vocalist D:** I think that depends and differs ...? From performer to performer ... I think that some people are better at dealing with those challenges [distractions] than others ...

**Vocalist E:** I think it becomes a bit easier to work through it in a performance. I think for a young singer, it's [restrictive dress] devastating, because your first gasp of air, becomes so tight, that the rest of everything is tight. As a more experienced singer, your brain works so quickly, that you mentally shape yourself into the next mode. And you know you get into survival mode, you just got to go through it, you know? And that is where practise and knowing what to do kicks in.

**Vocalist F:** You can, to a certain extent [fool the audience], if you are a good actress. You can. But then there's the psyche and the energy that the psyche portrays. And you cannot fake that, for the life of me, it's impossible. Because that energy transfers to the voice. And the voice's energy. And that energy ... the audience hears that energy. And it picks up on the energy level. And any insecurity would immediately be portrayed in the voice. Very experienced singers can cover that. It can be covered.

The analysis revealed that the more experienced performers are better at hiding discomfort than the less experienced performers. In addition, experience plays a role in overcoming discomfort psychologically and focusing attention on the music.

### **Subordinate theme 3: Performer distraction**

Concert dress has the potential to result in a distracted performance and create a constant awareness of dress which may detract from the overall quality of the performance.

**Vocalist E:** For me ... if something worries me ... no matter how well prepared I am, or whatever ... I am aware of it, but I know for the performance, then I have to get through it.

**Vocalist A:** ... because you're already focused on something else, you're no longer thinking of your dress, and lifting your shoulders up in order to keep something in place ...

**Vocalist C:** But also for the dress to ... not to distract or just be complementary, you have to put enough thought into it beforehand. Because, otherwise, it might actually be distracting, or ... uncomfortable, or whatever.

One of the participants reflected on her own experience of distraction during performance.

**Vocalist E:** ... the seam got undone, and then the dress was imbalanced in the front. So it wasn't at a straight angle, the seam... and when I... I was aware of it all the time, when I sang [laughing]. And then when I walked off, my foot got hooked in it again.

The following participants were of the opinion that distraction could have a detrimental effect on the performance and that it had the potential to affect both breathing and technique.

**Vocalist E:** It's like having a stone in your shoe. Your toe is constantly aware of it, your whole body is constantly aware of it. And, because your toe is part of your leg and your leg is part of your body, it affects your breathing. It affects everything. So I think it's very important.

**Vocalist A:** ... talking about the shawl, I've had that experience, and it's like I'm not learning [laughing]. Because it seems so nice [sic] that you put something around your shoulders, and the moment you start using your singing muscles, and lift your chest and things [sic], it tends to slip off, that you have to lock your elbows to keep the thing up there, or it just slips off one shoulder.



## ***Performer discomfort***

The participants revealed that discomfort resulted in distraction:

**Vocalist A:** [Chuckle] Ball gowns, proper ball gowns with boning ... tend to be restricting, as you're not used to it, you don't rehearse in dresses like that [...] and, all of a sudden, when you have to perform, you're in this straight-laced dress with skirts you're not used to, or trains you're not used to, it can greatly deter you from what you want to portray to the audience ... .

**Vocalist C:** I'm sure I've had dresses ... which caused some discomfort in the past. [...] but I personally don't like a dress that's cut so low that my ... that I'm scared that my boobs are going to fall out. [laughing].

**Vocalist E:** Once I started to sing, I felt the bodice was a bit short for my body; my body is much longer, and ... then I meant that the middle part of the bodice was a bit higher than my middle part, on my waist. [...] And you are constantly aware of ... suddenly your waist feels like it's just ... on your diaphragm.

Two participants had suffered injury as a result of dress:

**Vocalist F:** Tore my flesh to pieces while singing. The bodice was just an ill-fitting disaster, it kept wanting to slide off ... the dress was too long, I didn't know where to grab or what to hold on to ...

**Vocalist C:** It was something like a Requiem or a mass or a whatever, where you sit and you stand, and you sit and you stand ... and each time I sat down, and even when I got up, I felt this boning into my ribs.

## ***Ill fit***

The following participants expressed their opinions on what they regarded as ill-fitting dress:

**Vocalist C:** You know, you have to look at things ... like, for example, the dress is not too long and that you would possibly trip over the dress, and then ... people walking on and off stage holding their dresses, which looks absolutely horrible [...] And, uhm you have to make sure that that dress ... will not start falling off half way through whatever it is you sing, which I have seen ... plenty of times ...

**Vocalist F:** Ill fit would also imply something that is too long. You do not want to trip over volumes of material, or tulle, or anything. You must be able to move freely in it. Uhm ...

#### Subordinate theme 4: Lasting effect of wardrobe malfunction

Wardrobe malfunction is something that every performer wants to avoid. Not only does it distract and inhibit the performer, but it also distracts the audience. All the participants referred to a female classical vocalist who was competing in an international singing competition and whose dress fell off during the performance. The impact of this event was such that people are still talking about it today. No details about other aspects of her performance such as technique, vocal quality or interpretation are remembered except for the fact that her dress had fallen off.

**Vocalist C:** And dresses that fall off! There's nothing worse than ... there is an example: it was one of the first international singing competitions, and there was a Russian singer with a dress that started to slide [down]. And what do you do? You're on stage!

**Vocalist F:** I mean there's this horrible legend of a singer to whom it actually happened to. And ... you know, it's funny to laugh at it, but ... in retrospect, it's not hilarious.

Thus, as illustrated in this extreme example, wardrobe malfunction may be detrimental to a performance, both to the performer and the audience.

#### Superordinate theme 5: Criteria for the selection of dress

There are many factors that influence the selection of concert dress. These factors are grouped in superordinate theme criteria. Subordinate themes, such as trends, occasion, repertoire and extraneous factors, all play a role in the selection of concert dress. There are a number of subthemes suggested by the data that will be alluded to.

**Table 5: Superordinate theme 5: Criteria for the selection of dress, subordinate themes, subcategories and raw data themes**

Superordinate theme 5: Criteria for the selection of dress	
Subordinate themes	Raw data themes
<b>1. Trends</b>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> It's nice [sic] to be more modern on stage, I think you attract a more modern audience ...
<i>1.1. Body-focused dress</i>	<b>Vocalist C:</b> I don't think there's anything wrong with it.

<i>1.2. Body shape/size and proportion</i>	<b>Designer:</b> Proportion is more important than weight, so one can work with any size singer to make them look their best.
<b>2. Occasion</b>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> I think [dress] it's more suited to occasion than anything else...
<i>2.1. Time of day</i>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ... a morning concert, wearing a glittery ball gown, or something ... it's just not ... I think, appropriate or necessary ...
<i>2.2. Tradition and respect for the art form</i>	<b>Vocalist E:</b> It's just a standard code of conduct ...
<i>2.3. Venue</i>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> ... there is a big difference between singing in the Met, and singing in the Roodepoort Civic Theatre ...
<i>2.4. Concert wear and evening wear</i>	<b>Vocalist B:</b> ...they just wear whatever they wore to the matric dance and hope that it still fits ...
<b>3. Repertoire</b>	<b>Designer:</b> One does not wear the same gown for an opera gala as for a Schubert Lieder recital
<i>3.1. Fach</i>	<b>Vocalist B:</b> ... sopranos normally wear the ball gowns ...
<i>3.2. Dress colour and repertoire</i>	<b>Vocalist F:</b> ... choose the dress and the colour according to your programme ...
<i>3.3. Communication tool</i>	<b>Vocalist A:</b> ... we've got that tool to play with on stage to portray different characters, or different moods in songs ...
<i>3.4. Music and text</i>	<b>Vocalist C:</b> ... the integrity of the music should always be uppermost. The music and the text ...
<b>4. Extraneous factors</b>	<b>Vocalist B:</b> It includes not only the dress, but the hair, the jewellery, the correct make-up, the shoes, the whole tutti...
<i>4.1. Shoes</i>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> For me, the shoes are actually more important.
<i>4.2. Accessories</i>	<b>Vocalist D:</b> ... Carmen or somebody can have a shawl that they could play with to add sensuality ...
<i>4.3. Make up</i>	<b>Designer:</b> A professional make-up artist for big occasions is money well spent.

4.4. <i>Hair</i>	<b>Designer:</b> I don't like "hairstyles" on stage. Keep the hair as natural as possible ...
4.5. <i>Dress and level of performer</i>	<b>Vocalist F:</b> If your performance is on par with the dress, the audience will be off their feet.
4.6. <i>Underwear</i>	<b>Vocalist B:</b> ... you can't have too tight underwear
4.7. <i>Dress colour (lighting and skin tone)</i>	<b>Vocalist F:</b> ... which colours work on stage, what does not work for you on stage ...
4.8. <i>Fabric</i>	<b>Designer:</b> Some singers don't like knitted fabric as it moves too much as they breathe.

### Subordinate theme 1: Trends

It is apparent that, to some extent, fashion trends dictate concert dress preferences. The subthemes in this category include body focused dress and body shape/size and proportions.

#### ***Body-focused dress***

According to the participants, body-focused dress may be worn extremely successfully and may even be beneficial to the art of classical vocal performance. There are, however, factors that need to be taken into account before deciding on a more "figure-hugging" dress. These factors include body size.

**Vocalist A:** I think if you, as an opera singer, have the body to wear a tight fitting-dress and look beautiful in it, then why not? [...] It's nice to be more modern on stage, I think you attract a more modern audience ...

**Vocalist C:** ... I don't think there's anything wrong with it. [...] If you feel comfortable in what you do and you look beautiful, then absolutely! [...] But I think wearing something tight-fitting, or whatever ... looks beautiful, whatever it is, and try for it not to be distracting [...] I don't think we can get stuck in one style, or one... concept forever. It would never ... I don't think that the art would survive.

**Designer:** If a singer has a great body then, by all means, she can wear a figure hugging gown, so long as it is appropriate for the occasion.

The participant below referred to the stance of the body when singing and the fact that some body-focused dresses would not be conducive to singing as they would not be able to support the body sufficiently.

**Vocalist A:** ... but I would not go for short dresses, because ... we tend to have a certain way we have to stand in order to support the body, but, I mean... tight-fitting dresses ... if you've got the body, flaunt it. Not provocatively, but still very classy. You can do that.

It would, thus, appear that the participants felt that a revealing, body-focused dress could only be worn if the singer's physicality or body shape were suited to such a dress. However, an overweight vocalist should avoid a body-focused dress and rather wear a dress that would suit her body type better. As established earlier, over-revealing dresses should be avoided altogether.

### ***Body shape/size and proportion***

The participants pointed out that body size has an impact on the dress proportions. In addition, the venue and the size of the stage would also have an effect on the dress proportions as a bigger stage would suit a bigger dress.

**Vocalist B:** Well, the one thing we haven't touched on at all, which is very important, if you look at a ball gown, is size. The size of the body, of the stage [...] let's say you are a shortish person, and you are performing in quite a big venue... and the stage is quite big, the shorter ?, will unfortunately not look much bigger in the ball gown, jy lyk net soos n poeierkwas (*you look like a powder brush*). You know ... because you know [laughing] jy lyk net soos n klein poffie daarso (*you look like a little puffball*). It makes you look taller if you wear a slender dress and you are short ...

**Designer:** The size of singers has become important today since opera houses do not prefer overweight people on stage anymore. To me the voice of the singer comes first. You are not selling your body, but your voice. Proportion is more important than weight, so one can work with any size singer to make them look their best.

The data analysis revealed that the body's proportions are more important than the body's weight. It is advisable to wear a dress that suits a particular body. Body size and the correct proportions will also have an effect on both confidence and body image on stage.

## **Subordinate theme 2: Occasion**

The impact of occasion on the choice of dress was clearly significant and was affected by various factors such as time of day, tradition and respect for the art form, venue and the difference between concert wear and evening wear.

**Designer:** ...If it overpowers either her or the occasion, such a gown is a mistake.

**Vocalist E:** If it's a morning thing [occasion] you can get away with a cocktail dress, for a more informal... you can even also wear a nice, long cocktail dress, or that kind of thing also, with a softer material... pants... on stage, pants don't read well on women. If it's a much more informal thing like a soiree, or things like that, or a group singing, then a good suit can look very charming.

### ***Time of day***

Dress may, in some cases, be influenced by time of day. According to the data analysis, the formality of the concert and the attire are often linked to the time of day of the performance.

**Vocalist E:** I think it can be very tricky sometimes in the morning at 11:00 on a Sunday morning to be in a ball gown.

**Vocalist A:** ... let's say, a morning concert, wearing a glittery ball gown, or something ... it's just not ... I think, appropriate or necessary ...

One participant also linked occasion to venue. However, as expressed below, if the concert is held in a theatre, then the time of day is irrelevant.

**Vocalist A:** I think it [dress] depends also on the venue. If you know you are going to perform in a theatre, where it's dark, and it feels, when everyone steps inside, it can just as well be an evening-show.

### ***Tradition and respect for the art form***

Formal concert dress is perceived as a tradition and this is adhered to fairly strictly by the female classical vocalists. One of the main factors that underpin the adherence to the tradition of formal concert dress is respect for both the art form and the audience, although the venue and the difference between concert wear and evening wear were also of significance. One participant highlighted the historical relevance of formal concert dress although no other participants found this relevant:

**Vocalist C:** I think ... this started out ... a few centuries ago ... when this is simply how people dressed [formally and/or elaborately] when they ... when they went on stage and that carried over ... all these years ... uhm ... into today, and what it is we do when we do a concert.

**Vocalist A:** You have to ... it's part of what we do ... It is part of the package.

**Vocalist D:** I think it shows, as I said earlier, respect ... a mutual respect not only for the audience, but also to your art form. Uhm ... if you show it respect, it will show you some respect

**Vocalist E:** It's just a standard code of conduct, if I can call it that. Just like the orchestra has two sets of dress, either the tails or just the black jacket. I think it's very important for certain repertoire things that you should adhere to some kind of a dress code. [...] Even if I have to sing with a children's choir or that kind of thing... it's just... it's my art. It's what I adhere to [formal dress as a classical artist] [...] For me ... uhm ... I have respect for my art, I have respect for the music. That's ... firstly, I have respect for the music

**Vocalist D:** I like the idea of opera and classical music are elitist and formal and beautiful and they are events ...

One participant linked the tradition of formal concert dress to the feeling of security and comfort on stage which comes from being dressed appropriately for the occasion. However, another participant felt that the tradition of formal concert dress portrayed an impression of formality and \**Gesamtkunstwerk*.

**Vocalist E:** If ... In concert, you are on stage. I feel ... more comfortable to dress formally on stage.

**Vocalist F:** So I am absolutely for the tradition of being formally dressed, showing the utmost respect for your body, for your audience, by the way that you dress... again, *Gesamtkunstwerk*. For me, that is, that is the golden thread through everything, if you are a singer.

The analysis revealed that the tradition of wearing formal concert dress is a direct reflection of both the respect for the art form and an adherence to a certain code of conduct.

### **Venue**

The analysis revealed that venue is strongly linked to occasion and that both of these elements will, ultimately, have an impact on the formality of dress.

**Vocalist F:** ... you know what I also found important, is to not only focus on the dress, but ... uhm ... Mens moet baie bewus wees van die grootte van jou speelveld (*one should be aware of the size of your playing field*). The size of your stage ... determines how big to go ... or how tapered down it [the dress] must be.

**Vocalist B:** ... and it's a moerse stage at an enormous venue soos die Met of iets (*like the MET*) ... even the venue I was in the other night, which was quite big, the Aula. Dis nogal groot (*It's quite big*). So the stage is quite big, if you want to make an impression there, and even the State Theatre stage, you must really... you can go a bit bigger. Maar die ding is, n ball gown lyk nou nie goed as jy nie n middle het nie. Dan lyk jy net soos n ball [laughing]. Jy verstaan? (*the thing is, a ball gown does not look that good if you don't have a waist. Then you look like a ball, do you understand?*)

**Vocalist D:** I think ... whether we like it or not, there is a big difference between singing in the Met and singing in the Roodepoort Civic Theatre; as much as it's ... a lovely theatre to sing in. But, if I was invited and felt confident enough to sing in the Met tomorrow, I think I'd have a new dress made.

**Vocalist E:** If I have to sing the same programme in a house concert ... I would not dress formally. I will dress formal, but not black tie ... that kind of thing. You will still look presentable and, well, but I will not dress in evening wear ... If it's in a house, a *soiree* maybe ... that's what I meant by different dresses, but on stage, I will always dress formally.

**Vocalist F:** ... so uhm ... ja ... Ek dink mens moet baie meer dinge in ag neem as wat jy net fokus op die rok ... vir my gaan dit oor ... (*I think one should take more things into consideration than just the dress. For me, it's also about ...*) the quality of the work, the dress. And then, the stage; will the stage be able to carry the dress as well. The stage, we ... the appropriate setting for that particular dress.

Thus, ultimately it would appear that the formality of dress would be influenced by the occasion and venue of the performance: the bigger the occasion (stage/venue), the bigger the dress.

### **Concert wear and evening wear**

The difference between evening wear and concert dress is indistinguishable to the perceiver's eye. The following quotations illustrate the importance of ensuring that concert dress is custom made because "off the shelf evening wear" does not accommodate the breathing technique used in singing and this may, in turn, results in an ill-fitting concert dress.



**Vocalist D:** ... I think very few people can walk into a shop and buy a concert dress off the rack. I think very few people can. There's going to be... there are, maybe, few, and I dislike them intensely [laughing], uhm ... that shouldn't be allowed [laughing]. And I think most people have their concert wear made. [...] And you also have to remember that your average concert wear may be considered evening wear by someone else. And average evening wear may be considered concert wear. But a singer needs a little bit of extra space. You are going to breathe a bit more, so ... so tight fit around the waist is not, perhaps, exactly what you need. Uhm ... sometimes you need something that uhm ... yeah ...

**Vocalist E:** And the other thing is that the boutique dresses aren't made for your body. You are very, very lucky if you find a dress that is absolutely well constructed for your body. [...] Because you might find beautiful dresses and you look well in it, but it's not always a good singing dress, because ... maybe that part is too short, or maybe it's too long ... or ...

**Vocalist F:** For me, it's [ready-made dresses] the biggest NO NO on earth.

In conclusion, evening wear does not necessarily cater for the demands of breathing and body movements during performance and, thus, it is advisable to have concert dress made specifically for the purpose.

#### **Subordinate theme 4: Repertoire**

According to the analysis, repertoire may have a significant effect on the selection of concert dress. The sub-factors addressed in this section include fabric, dress colour and repertoire, communication tool and music and text.

Most of the participants were of the opinion that dress should reflect the repertoire whereas others felt that a close adherence to repertoire may transform concert dress into costume. As revealed in the following statements some of the participants were of the opinion maintained that it is advisable to dress according to the repertoire selected:

**Vocalist F:** Profound [repertoire has a profound effect on dress]. If you were to present a recital ... a Lieder recital, consisting of Spanish items in your programme, as an example: it would be far to the singer's advantage to dress appropriately and accordingly.

**Vocalist A:** Well, the more serious things you sing, meaning the Lieder ... or ... an oldish [sic] lady ... or whatever role you perform when you sing ... [or] you do a concert version of an opera, it will definitely affect what you wear. [...] Carmen-like costume if you don't sing Habanera. You have to dress appropriately ...

**Vocalist C:** I wouldn't want to do a Lieder concert in a humungous ball gown, because, generally, I don't think it goes with the music you're singing. [...] the one cycle I'm going to do for my doctorate, Krämerspielen, is ... mainly from the composer's point of view, so, for example ... that, I personally don't think that a big ball gown would fit ... into the background of the text.

### **Fach**

As confirmed by the following participant responses the selection of concert dress is often influenced by the fach of a vocalist:

**Vocalist B:** ... but I think the sopranos normally wear the ball gowns, quite frankly. [...] En dan as die sopraan se sy dra n ball gown, dan is dit fantasties (*And if the soprano says she was to wear a ball gown, then that is fantastic*), but it doesn't mean that the mezzo ... mezzos don't have to wear ball gowns when sopranos wear ball gowns. If the soprano is wearing a ball gown, she's probably doing a whole florid aria, en sy show dit alles af, en dit laat haar goed voel, dan wonderlik (*And she "shows off" making her feel good, then wonderful*), then you wear something that matches that, that doesn't overpower it, dit moet haar nie upstage nie (*It shouldn't upstage her*), but so that she doesn't look soos die bediende van lansaan wat ingehaal is om te kom sing nie (*She mustn't look like the domestic worker from next door who was brought in to sing*), because that also happens, and that's horrible. Ne, it happens often ... So you wear something normally more streamline...

**Vocalist D:** ... in the case of a mezzo, perhaps play a role ... in the sense of perhaps wearing ... singing the male characters ...?

The analysis revealed that certain types of dress such as ball gowns may be worn by sopranos. However, according to the participants, when sharing the stage with a soprano in a ball gown, a mezzo-soprano should avoid "upstaging" the soprano.

### **Dress colour and repertoire**

The colour of a concert dress has the potential to signal something about the repertoire which is to be performed. The colour of a concert dress is, therefore, highly significant and should be carefully selected.

**Vocalist E:** ... when you do something with a ... that's got a much more religious tone, like oratorio, and things like that, people [performers] tend to wear black. It looks very solemn, and it actually fits the repertoire, it fits the occasion.

**Vocalist B:** And you are presenting who you want to present in this specific piece of music. So as jy nou Maria Magdalena is, dan dra jy nie rooi nie (*for instance, if you are performing the character of Mary Magdalene, then you don't wear red*). [...] Maar jy dra n sagter rok, jy gaan dra nou nie n suit nie (*Then you wear a more delicate dress, you don't go wearing a suit*), so you wear a sort of a softer thing to show that you are a more vulnerable character in the oratorio.

**Vocalist F:** If you look at it from a traditional point of view, I would say definitely yes [dress colour is connected to repertoire]. It would be appropriate to choose the dress and the colour according to your programme, like you would style a very nice lieder recital. You plan your programme, and, therefore, you should also plan the colour that you are going to wear.

Thus, according to the participants, dress colour should be carefully considered as it may be linked to appropriateness in the performance of oratorios and other sacred works.

### **Communication tool**

The analysis revealed that dress may be used as an effective communication tool between audience and performer. However, this is true only if concert dress reflects, at least to some extent, the repertoire and musical content.

**Vocalist C:** [Pausing] ... you know, it's possible that it can be used as a communication tool, the only way in which it can be used as a communication tool, I think, is ... if it has bearing on what it is that you sing there. You know ... the content of what you sing.

**Vocalist A:** I think the dress can help where ... I think that we are more fortunate than men in that way, that we've got that tool to play with on stage to portray different characters, or different moods in songs ...

Thus, using dress and its accessories as a communication tool was clearly valuable to the participants, whether dress was used as an expression of individuality or to reflect the repertoire. Dress has the ability to give the audience a clear picture of what they may expect. This, in turn, has a direct connection with audience perceptions and expectation which will be discussed in the superordinate theme pertaining to the audience.

## **Music and text**

In this section the participants expressed their opinions about the importance of the music and the text in a performance:

**Vocalist C:** ... I honestly believe that the integrity of the music should always be uppermost. The music and the text, I never want to leave the text out, as you can hear, it's such a big part of what we do. I absolutely believe that. [...] So that you can solely concentrate on the music and the words when you are on stage.

**Designer:** The gown should enhance the singer as she walks out on stage but once she opens her mouth the gown must disappear and she must become one with the music.

The vocalist cited below expressed her view on the tradition of wearing formal concert dress. She stated that she had mixed feelings about the matter. On the one hand she felt that it was a wonderful practice to wear the formal concert dress associated with Western classical music but, on the other hand, she felt that a performance should be all about the music:

**Vocalist D:** ... and then there's another half that feels... "what a load of trash. It's all about the music ..."

Ultimately, a performance is concerned with the music. Without music and text, there would be no performance. Although dress and appearance on stage play an extremely important role in performance their role is, nevertheless, a secondary and collaborative role as compared to that of the music and the text as they are not able to deliver a performance on its own.

### **Subordinate theme 4: Extraneous factors**

There are several other factors that may impact on a performance. These factors were grouped together under the subordinate theme of extraneous factors and refer to everything that may be considered as complementary to concert dress and general appearance on stage. Included in these factors were themes such as accessories, hair, make-up, underwear and shoes. These were all mentioned by the participants.

## Shoes

According to the participants shoes are extremely important, not only in terms of comfort, but also because they are often at the eye-level of the audience if one is performing on stage. It is, thus, essential that shoes be attractive and they suit the dress.

**Designer:** She must also wear clean and well-made shoes, since they are very close to the eye level of the audience.

**Vocalist B:** Also the colour of the shoes is quite important, ne, you can't just wear black with everything ... elegance in shoes ... understated, but completing the outfit. [...] Not distracting, but they must complete the picture. As jy so van bo af onder toe kyk, dan moet hulle die goeie climax wees onder (*If you scan the outfit from top to bottom, the shoes should be a good climax*), and the same way up ...

**Vocalist C:** ... your shoes must be comfortable [...] And some of the big singers used to say: "what's the most important thing on stage? Comfortable shoes."

**Vocalist A:** Like ... wearing sandals with a long dress, you only see toes.

The participants highlighted the importance of comfort during performance but also mentioned the fact that high heels may affect posture and this, in turn, may adversely affect the performance.

**Vocalist E:** ... but once you are in proper concert shoes, uhm ... you forget that maybe they can slip, or maybe you can step on your dress ...

**Designer:** Shoes should be comfortable. I have often suggested cleaning house in the heels worn over socks to stretch them. Also, practise walking in a gown. Once a singer hits the stage she does not need to lift the skirt at all. She lifts the skirt with her right hand only when she goes upstairs. Never with both hands.

**Vocalist B:** The heels were not allowed to be too high, I still agree with that. I've seen people sing in high heels, but my brain tells me, because of how the body works, that it messes up the curve of the back ... of the spine. So, uhm ... you may be able to do it for a while, and you may be able to carry it off for a short recitaltjie, but, ultimately, it's gonna be ... your muscles can't really support your singing properly, if you have a curved spine.

**Vocalist D:** ... I've always been reasonably tall, so ... a particularly high heel is not important to me. Plus the fact that I'm not comfortable in a very high heel, so I would look like an idiot ...

**Vocalist E:** Well, I don't like high heels because it causes an imbalance in my body. [...] I think is not a very ... good, or healthy thing for anybody. [...] And once it affects the spine, it affects your hips, it affects your whole alignment, and your body core, and that kind of thing.

Only one of the participants indicated that high heels have a positive effect on technique and support although this may simply imply that singing in heels may be a matter of preference.

**Vocalist F:** For me, it [high heels] definitely helps support. Friends of mine have said that they cannot sing in high heels, and I find it extremely difficult in a flat pump. But it's a habit, it's a thing I grew up with, so it's a very individual thing [laughing].

According to the analysis, comfortable shoes are extremely important; however, the height of the heel and what is regarded as comfortable are subjective matters and differ from performer to performer. Nevertheless, the participants were unanimous that the shoes had to suit the dress and look attractive.

### **Accessories**

The participants highlighted the impact of accessories and appearance on stage. They considered accessories to be useful in their portrayal of different characters, helping to create a persona or setting the atmosphere during performance.

**Vocalist D:** I suppose, if you need, you could use it ... I think a Carmen or somebody can have a shawl that they could play with to add sensuality. Similarly, you can ... one can use ... if you have the same kind of thing, that comes over [the shoulders], you can use it as something to hide behind ... to show reluctance or something like that.

**Vocalist B:** It includes not only the dress, but the hair, the jewellery, the correct make-up, the shoes, the whole tutti, the stockings, alles (everything). Uhm ... so I would say, that the importance is enormous, and it is often underestimated. [...] Ja, dit is baie belangrik dat jy miskien net ... (*it's very important to just ...*) something masculine... even if it's just a sort of military jacket that you put on ... for that one aria, and then you take it off again.

**Vocalist A:** ... we're back to the shawl [mentioned earlier], maybe wear one for the ... for, the Bach, and the ... more religious numbers, and then you can take it off for when you are a bit raunchy [sic] in your recital.

**Vocalist E:** I've only been on with a shawl once and, because I was on stage a lot, like opera stage, we were taught how to handle shawls. But, once you are in a concert dress, you feel a bit more exposed to it because it has to be part of your dress, also and it's not always pinned onto your dress. And a feather boa can give a wonderful effect also ...

The following participant believed that accessories should be kept to a minimum as they have the potential to take the personal aspect of concert dress out of the performance and turn the concert dress into costume:

**Vocalist F:** Costume and concert dress ... there is a fine line ... not to go overboard, but to present it very stylishly, and with class. With ... I would say, minimal use of props ... not to go overboard with it ... but I would definitely use props ... costume ... there is a fine line.

It would also appear that accessories have the potential to distract the performer as well as the audience by too much attention being focused on the accessories.

**Vocalist F:** ... for me, it's easier if you have a fairly elaborate dress... that speaks for itself. And then use minimal props like a shawl. For me, personally, I am not too fond of a shawl, I always find the thing very uncomfortable, and it always glides off and falls on the floor, and then I need to pick it up, and what to do then; how to pick it up elegantly, or... you know that I'm saying? I would prefer small items like gloves, or a fan, or a rose in the hair that you can easily detach, or attach to the hair ... ja ...

**Vocalist B:** It can't be anything that attracts negative attention, or even too much positive attention...

However, as indicated in the following excerpt, there were also advantages to the use of accessories as they could be regarded as an alternative to a dress change:

**Vocalist D:** I make my changes ... with ... uhm ... I'm sure you've seen what I sang in, I normally sing in a long dress, and then I wear something over, so it's very easy to change something over [sic]

## **Make-up**

Although make up is an important aspect of general appearance on stage relatively few of the participants discussed the importance of make-up. The following participants shared their views on the role of make up in general appearance.

**Designer:** A professional make-up artist for big occasions is money well spent.

**Vocalist B:** ... the whole make-up thing ... it mustn't be too harlekyn-erig (clowninsh), but it can't be dull. It can't be normal make-up, the way you have on ... Ja, jy moet so bietjie meer (yes, you must add a little more) ... But it doesn't have to be red lipstick, or a ... it must also be apt ... for what you are doing, and ja ... the rest is the attire.

According to the participants, it is important to find the correct balance when wearing make-up, as either too much or too little make-up could have a significant effect on appearance on stage. It is, thus, clearly advisable to use a professional make-up artist for performance occasions.

## **Hair**

Hair also has a significant effect on appearance. However, two participants only referred to the role of hair in appearance on stage. Nevertheless, as illustrated in the following responses, the correct hairstyle may make the difference between looking polished and looking unprepared:

**Designer:** I don't like "hairstyles" on stage. Keep the hair as natural as possible and stay away from "up do's" since they look artificial unless the singer wears her hair like that every day. One must never look as if she is trying too hard. Otherwise the whole affect is lost.

**Vocalist B:** ... en jou hare hang so (*and your hair is not neat*) ... because some people don't pay attention to their hair, that should be away from the face, and then there's a sort of a little fringe slipping over that you have to sort of ... do this [demonstrates a movement to get the hair out of the face].

In summary, hairstyle clearly plays a role in adding to the overall performance and, therefore, hair should always be neat, away from the face and as natural as possible.



### ***Dress and level of performer***

The participants indicated that the experience level of a performer should be considered when selecting a concert dress. The participants revealed that, in general, a novice performer should avoid extravagant or elaborate dress. This observation will be discussed in more detail under the subordinate theme of audience response.

**Designer:** For a singer starting her career, it is better to wear something less elaborate that feels and looks comfortable. The person should wear the dress and not the dress wear the person [...] To me it is very disturbing to see a young singer in a diva gown with shoulder length earrings. There is enough time for that when a singer has established her career. [...] I do not recommend this for a singer who is less established since it can distract from her performance [wearing elaborate dress]. A singer should look beautiful, stylish and attractive when she walks on stage; but after that the persona must disappear and the music and voice must become the main attraction.

**Vocalist F:** And any insecurity would immediately be portrayed in the voice. Very experienced singers can cover that. It can be covered, but I would not expose an inexperienced, young singer to try to carry off a big, dramatic ball gown. I would definitely clothe her in something that is appropriate for her emotional development. [...] But it's not only the vocal development that would determine the way that a singer would carry a dress, the emotional maturity as well. I find that extremely important, and I think people sometimes underestimate the EQ, and only give attention to IQ.

The same participant also referred to “dress and level of performance” and “dress and audience expectation”.

**Vocalist F:** If your performance is on a par with the dress, the audience will be off their feet. It is again ... that interaction and interplay. If you as a singer do not perform on par with the standard of the dress that you are wearing, it will definitely distract your audience ...

It was apparent that the participants felt that the selection of concert dress should be in line with the experience of the performer. Celebrated artists are able to afford to wear elaborate dress where a beginner should focus on simple, but elegant, dress to ensure that the attention is focused on the music and the text.

## **Underwear**

Although an important aspect of concert dress, two of the participants only mentioned underwear.

**Vocalist B:** ... jy weet, jou onderklere moet reg wees (*you know, your underwear must be right*), you can't have too tight underwear, never mind what is visible. And stockings kan nie afsak nie ... (and the stockings may not sag downward)

**Vocalist F:** I think it also has to do with the physicality of the singer in question. How fit the body is, how the muscle structure on the whole of the particular singer is functioning. And that would determine underwear ... underwear is very important ...

Comfort and the overall appearance of concert dress may be affected by underwear while body shape and size should also be taken into consideration when selecting underwear for a specific dress. Visible underwear is undesirable and should be avoided at all cost.

## **Dress colour, lighting and skin tone**

**Vocalist B:** And not all colours look good on stage. Mense dra wit, dit lyk kak op die verhoog (*People wear white on stage and it looks very bad*). Because it goes yellow, and... for concert lighting, because there's no real good lighting for a concert, normally, you know. En dan gaan dit geel, en dan lyk jy eintlik net uitgewas (*your skin colour becomes yellow and you look washed out*) ...

**Vocalist F:** ...which colours work on stage, what does not work for you on stage [...] It could affect the colour of the dress as well. So ... these aspects must be taken into consideration and, if possible, I would like to take a dress on stage, and see what happens to it under the lights. Something might look very bland in plain sunlight, but when you put it on stage, it comes alive, and it's absolutely mind-blowing, you cannot believe it's the same gown.

**Vocalist C:** I come back to ... colour, of course, I want to feel ... I won't easily go on stage if ... and I've never, even when I was really thin, I never liked going on stage (particularly much) in a white dress, for example.

**Designer:** A black gown has always been a favourite [sic] since most people look slimmer in a dark gown and black is as dark as one can get. I think it can be a safe choice but not a very exciting one. Dark Purple or Dark Blue can look just as slimming but color [sic] pleases the eye more.

As regards the different race groups and skin tones on stage, the following participant expressed how contrasting colours may work to a performer's advantage.

**Vocalist B:** ... it's not the same for all race groups. Because ... black people look fantastic in white, and they also look beautiful ... in things like cream, or that biscuit colour, of geel, and even something like a burnt orange [...] Not many people wear that on stage very often, but they can look very good [in that]. But ... they don't look that wonderful in black. Because it doesn't really contrast with the skin much. And then it's a little bit of a very dark picture, wat alles half so inmekaar in smelt (*everything melts into each other*) ...

In conclusion, the analysis revealed that, in general, performers with a fair skin tone should avoid wearing white on stage. Colours that contrast with the skin tone of the performer are far more effective and create an interesting and desirable effect.

### **Fabric**

Fabric type is a factor that is not often considered in the choice and appearance of a concert dress. Nevertheless, the appropriate fabric for concert dress is important because not all fabrics present well on stage.

**Designer:** This differs from singer to singer and they will guide the designer. Some singers don't like knitted fabrics as it moves too much as they breathe. It can be distracting to the audience to watch a gown move with every breath the singer takes. Noisy fabrics like taffetas are also not desirable as they make noises when the singer moves.

**Vocalist E:** Too shiny things. If it's too shiny ... because you always have light on you, so I think things that reflect back terribly [sic], I think one should avoid.

**Vocalist B:** ... it must not be something that creases, so that if you are in an oratorio, or in any other situation where you sit, and you have to get up again, dan sit die ding tussen jou boude vas (*and then the thing gets stuck between your buttocks*), and that kind of thing.

The participants mentioned that factors such as stage lighting and freedom of movement during singing and performance should be borne in mind when choosing a fabric. In general, a static fabric with little movement should be avoided. Fabrics that allow free movement of the body were recommended as a performer very seldom stands completely still during a performance.

### 4.3 Summary

In short, the data analysis revealed that dress has the ability to be psychologically as well as physically empowering. This feeling of empowerment, whether physical or psychological, depended on a number of factors. Proper fit, mental comfort and a balance between personal style and adherence to repertoire were clearly extremely important to the participants. Dress was also regarded as a useful tool in adopting a persona and, thus, it had an impact on stage behaviour. One participant, however, mentioned that dress did not have much of an effect on her feeling of empowerment as she regarded dress as something superficial.

Nevertheless, although dress may have a positive effect on female classical vocalists, it also has the potential to hinder a performer. Dress may become distracting, uncomfortable and had caused injury in certain cases. The factors that played a role in the negative impact of dress included, inter alia, over-revealing and ill-fitting dress. The participants also mentioned the guidance and advice that novice performers should bear in mind when selecting concert dress with elegance, neutrality, good fit and comfort being at the top of the priority list when selecting a concert dress.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Introduction

The study set out primarily to investigate the meaning of concert dress to female classical vocalists. There are several interacting factors that contribute to the effect of concert dress on the female classical vocalist. The secondary research questions aimed to examine: 1) the connection between dress and body image; 2) the connection between concert dress and repertoire; and 3) the impact of dress on body movements and stage behaviour. Concert dress is not only a superficial covering of the body, but it also has a psychological effect on both performer and audience. To date, the phenomenological experience of female classical vocalists in terms of concert dress have remained largely unexplored.

The investigation into the views of experienced South African female classical vocalists, as well as the “off-stage” and behind the scenes approach of a dress designer to international singers, resulted in rich data. The designer’s particular skills set and knowledge of the physical and psychological impact of dress provided a novel perspective while also enhancing the understanding of the similarities and differences in the opinions of the female vocalists.

This chapter contains a discussion of the interview transcriptions with reference to five superordinate themes, namely: 1. Audience; 2. Empowerment through dress; 3. Personal style; 4. Inhibiting factors of dress; and 5. Criteria for the selection of dress. The research results are discussed in relation to the literature review. The chapter will conclude with a short summary of the contents of the chapter.

#### **Superordinate theme 1: Audience**

The audience plays an important role in any performance. In this study the participants expressed opinions based on their phenomenological perspective as audience members. They also discussed what they believed the audience’s perceptions of their performances and appearances may be.

Hagberg (2003: 3) highlighted the overall impact of dress on audience distraction by referring to a shoulder strap that might slip down the violinist's arm, or pianist's hair that constantly falls into the face. According to Hagberg (2003), all these examples draw attention away from the music.

The literature revealed that over-revealing dress may have a negative impact on the perception on ability (Citron 2004: 49; Griffiths 2009: 175). This finding was consistent with the research study findings as the following participant stated that:

**Vocalist B:** But very often the people who display their bodies so much don't have that much of a technique, singing wise. I find that's ... normally the case ...

Over-revealing and flamboyant dress not only has a negative impact on the perception of ability, but may also distract the audience (Hagberg 2003). In support of this statement the participants had the following to say:

**Designer:** What any GREAT singer wants is to avoid is any gown that distracts from her performance. She is an artist who will be on stage in order to interpret a composer's work. Nothing should come between the audience's attention and the music.

Vocalists E and F particularly felt that over-revealing dress was distasteful and distracting to the audience, as it had an effect on their ability to concentrate on the music.

Over-revealing dress that places the focus on the body has a distracting and limiting effect on female performance. This, in turn may be detrimental to the performance, particularly in view of the fact that over-revealing dress is regarded as inappropriate in Western classical music performances (Griffiths 2011: 32). However, appropriate dress may also have a positive and entertaining effect on performance.

The effect of dress on audience expectation was also extremely important to the participants. They expressed the view that audience perceptions and expectations are immediately affected by what a performer wears. The following participants had this to say:

**Vocalist B:** It [dress] has an enormous impact because I know, as an audience member, when somebody enters the stage, you already think ... "oh, ek dink dit gaan so klink ..." (I think that this performance will sound like that).

Like Vocalist B, Vocalist A also shared her experiences as an audience member and said that a performer entering a stage in a beautiful ball gown creates an expectation for the programme to “go with it”.

Current literature has not discussed the effect of dress on audience entertainment. However, one participant expressed the following opinion on the effect of dress on audience entertainment:

**Vocalist F:** Impulsive, uncontrollable applause, the moment you set foot on stage, for the gown, for the dress. [...] The audience was very receptive and they appreciated it very much, I could feel the energy and receptiveness, the appreciation. Again, like I said earlier, the better you present yourself, and the more it forms a complete whole ...

Vocalists D and E also revealed that dress changes during performance had a positive effect on audience entertainment. Vocalist E commented on the different “feel” another dress could add to a programme, and that it could be “fun” for both performer and audience member.

The literature referred to in this study did not allude to the effect of dress change on the audience entertainment value in performance. Audience perception was of particular importance to the participants and was discussed in great detail. These findings revealed a fascinating aspect of audience entertainment, thus contributing to the existing research in the field of concert dress. Dress has the potential to immediately affect the audience’s expectations and perceptions of a performer. This is consistent with the findings of Lehman et al. (2007: 167), who stated that people make judgements based on what other people look like.

### **Superordinate theme 2: Empowerment through dress**

Researchers agree that clothes have an effect on women in general (Hollander 1993: 314). This finding was supported by vocalist B, who stated the following:

**Vocalist B:** In the first place, it has an impact on any woman: how she looks.

The positive psychological and physical effects of dress may be interpreted as empowerment through dress. The literature concluded that empowerment through dress was experienced on the basis of clothing that projected the desired image to onlookers (Guy & Banim 2000; Tyner & Ogle 2007). This “desired image” is linked to an image of control, confidence and competence. This finding is no different to the “desired image” which a female classical vocalist wishes to project to her audience. In this study empowerment through dress is divided into two major subthemes: 1) psychological empowerment and 2) physical empowerment.

### ***Psychological empowerment***

Psychological empowerment through dress proved to be important and fairly prevalent in the experiences of the female classical vocalists. The data revealed that the experiences of empowerment through dress of the female classical vocalists were similar to the findings in current research. The literature revealed that empowerment through dress is closely linked to body image and to wearing clothing that flatter the body (Guy & Banim 2000: 320):

... my overriding concern is to make sure that my bottom is hidden from view ... In fact, my primary concern when I buy clothes is to disguise my hips and my bottom which I am very conscious of. Yet I know that, rationally speaking, I am not overweight - it's just the shape of my body that needs some help.

Similar experiences were described by the following participants:

**Vocalist B:** Well, body image should begin with a dress that fits properly ...

**Vocalist D:** The more I can hide the better. [...] I think if you ... feel good about yourself, bearing in mind that other people are going to be looking at you as you perform, it does make it easier to perform successfully.

Confidence, mental comfort and the effect of dress on stage behaviour and persona were all significant in the experiences of psychological empowerment through dress. Hagberg's (2003: 8) finding that dress does indeed improve self-confidence on stage is consistent with the findings of this study:

**Vocalist C:** Because so many performers feel more self-confidence ... they feel better when they walk on stage in ... looking beautiful, it carries over to the audience, and what it is that they do.



With regards to the aspect of persona in psychological empowerment, Anderson (2005: 124) states that the visual presentation of a performer forms part of the performer's persona. Similar findings were observed in this study:

**Vocalist D:** And I think it's [a different persona due to dress] definitely there [...] And if it [dress] assists you to do that and that [dress] assists you in giving a better performance ... sure!

It is, thus, clear from both the literature review and the findings of this study that dress has an enormous psychological impact on the self. However, as a result of the high stress levels, the psychological impact of dress is intensified when on stage in a performance situation (Rosset i Llobet 2007: 79).

### ***Physical empowerment through dress***

With regard to physical empowerment through dress, the literature emphasised the importance of freedom of movement (Griffiths 2011). Griffiths's (2011:37) research revealed that different instrumentalists have different requirements in terms of dress as regards freedom of movement and expressivity.

The findings of this study revealed that physical empowerment through dress has three components, namely, physical comfort, the positive effect of dress on singing technique and freedom of movement. The importance of freedom of movement is the only requirement that was consistent with the literature findings (Griffiths 2009; 2011). Vocalist B revealed that a dress might look good when the performer is standing still, but might react differently when the performer moves, having potentially embarrassing effects.

The data revealed that the body is used as an expressive tool in performance. Dress should, therefore, not hamper freedom of movement as this has the potential to impact on the expressivity in performance. This finding was consistent with the findings of Griffiths (2011).

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was the fact that that dress had a positive effect on singing technique. This is a truly fascinating concept. Vocalist F revealed that a corset may assist in breath support and posture during a vocal performance. The designer reported that a South African soprano of international standing also preferred

a “firm” corset. The other participants felt that dress should not be restrictive in any way. The positive effect of dress on singing technique is also a concept that current literature has neglected to explore.

### **Superordinate theme 3: Personal style**

The literature described personal style as prioritising the concept of self (Tyner & Ogle 2007: 89). Tyner and Ogle (2007) established that comfortable, functional clothing that fits well is an expression of individuality and signifies a resistance to prevailing fashion trends.

The research findings revealed mixed responses to the concept of personal style in the selection of concert dress. Some of the participants indicated the extreme importance of personal style. However, they felt that personal style was more important in a recital situation as the performer is not portraying a character as in a full scale opera. Even when performing in a number of different styles, repertoire or even genres, dress that reflected personal style was still considered as more important:

**Vocalist C:** ... when I do a recital, wearing a dress which I like, it [should] bring out my personal ... well, I don’t know if a dress can bring out your personality, but it’s something I like, and I feel it suits me. [...] And colour ... once again, it will be a colour that I particularly like, you know. I love going on stage in black, uhm ... I ... and, if not black, then generally I like ... sort of cooler jewel colours ...

On the other hand, vocalist B indicated that personal style should not be taken too seriously in a performance, as the purpose of a performance is not to make a “fashion statement”.

Most of the participants however agreed that the ideal was a “fashion balance” in dress that expressed individuality and also conformed loosely to the repertoire to be performed.

The balance between personal style and conforming to the repertoire is clearly ideal. This finding was consistent with the research of Tyner and Ogle (2007), who found that the merging of individuality/personal style and conforming to current fashion trends resulted in the perfect “fashion balance”, unique to one’s needs in terms of body image and identity (Tyner & Ogle 2007: 94).

Other subordinate themes that related to personal style included upbringing, social norms, training and guidance. However, most of these aspects of concert dress, or dress in general, have not been discussed in the current literature. With regards to upbringing, vocalist B reported that her father had a significant impact on her opinion of dress, and that a performer has to not only look presentable from the front, but from the back as well. On the other hand, vocalist C commented on the fact that dress was regarded as superficial in her upbringing

According to the study findings social norms were generally regarded as not very important. Not one of the participants indicated that they felt inclined to dress in a way that challenged social norms:

**Vocalist C:** You know, I've never thought about it much [...] So ... I never really thought about it because I'm not the kind of person, I've never been the kind of person who would wear ... I've never been a controversial dresser, really. Interesting dresser, maybe ... previously. So I never really had to think about social norms, I think.

The impact of training on personal style on stage was remarkable with most of the participants referring to the fact that training had had an impact on their opinion of concert dress. Vocalists B and C reported that their training was rather strict with regards to appearance onstage. Vocalist C's experience focused on the importance of being comfortable on stage. Interestingly, she was taught that it was inadvisable to sing in a new dress, as one needs to feel how it fits in a performance situation, especially when singing.

Vocalist B specifically mentioned that she was taught how to dress by her professor. A significant example was that it was advisable to wear closed shoes, always accompanied with stockings. Furthermore, they were strongly advised to avoid any type of dress that might be strapless or too revealing.

Hagberg (2003) is the only source that discussed the aspect of guidance in concert dress. Hagberg (2003: 100) also stated that, in general, revealing dress should be avoided on stage. Participants expressing similar opinions about revealing dress were in line with the literature:

**Vocalist C:** For women... that's one of the most important things: don't wear low cut things.

**Designer:** She must make sure the neck is not too low or the gown is too short.

Female classical vocalists should generally avoid over-revealing dress. The study also revealed novel aspects relating to personal style in concert dress, including upbringing, training and guidance. However, current literature has failed to discuss these issues.

Lehmann et al. (2007) revealed that not sufficient attention and guidance are given to the extra-musical factors/visual aspects of a performance. However, these “extra-musical factors” have a direct impact on the audience's perceptions of the performer's musicianship (Lehmann et al. 2007: 174). The views which the participants expressed about guidance were similar to the findings of Lehmann et al. (2007). Vocalist D specifically reported that “not enough attention” is paid to dress and appearance onstage. She also felt that appearance played a significant role in the identity of a performer when on stage. Similar views were shared by the following participant's comments:

**Vocalist C:** I think it's important that we actually teach them ... uhm ... all of these things we were talking about now ... they should be aware of the fact that ... for a singer, even more that for any instrumentalist, it [dress] is important... because we don't ... I always say you can't even hide behind a tiny piccolo.

#### **Superordinate theme 4: Inhibiting factors of dress**

Over-revealing dress has a similar effect on the performer as it has on the audience. The psychological impact of over-revealing dress on the body image of the performer is enormous. This finding is consistent with Griffiths (2009: 171) who divulged that one of the participants in her study had refused to leave the dressing room because she felt “too exposed” in her revealing dress. This study revealed that over-revealing and ill-fitting dress resulted in both discomfort and distraction, as reported by vocalists A and C in their personal experiences.

Thus, over-revealing and ill-fitting dress not only has a distracting effect on the audience, but clearly on the performer as well. Hagberg (2003) maintains that the audience finds it distracting if a violinist's strap keeps slipping down her arm. This statement was consistent with Griffiths' (2011) finding that one of the participants (a violinist) in her study had

avoided wearing dresses with straps as the instrument kept slipping on the strap of the dress. Thus, inhibiting dress distracts for both the audience members and the performer.

Another violinist testified that her dress had come undone when she had bowed and this had had a major impact on expressive body movements (Griffiths 2011:39). Wardrobe malfunction on stage was a subject dreaded by all the participants. Most of the participants referred to a contestant in an international singing competition whose dress had fallen off. This is an indication of the lasting effect of any wardrobe malfunction. The particular singer referred to in the research became famous for her wardrobe malfunction and not for her singing.

**Vocalist B:** Because we have seen competitions where dresses moved as far down as lower than nipple level on people, because their dresses had no straps on. Daar is videos daarvan (*there are videos of it*), it's probably on Youtube, Anonymous was the international competition guy at Unisa and we spoke about it again the other day. It mustn't be embarrassing, ever. [...] And the funny thing is: people remember that...

Thus, this research study has made a contribution to the existing knowledge of the devastating and lasting effect of wardrobe malfunction in performance. However, current literature has not examined the effect of wardrobe malfunction on performance.

### **Superordinate theme 5: Criteria for the selection of dress**

Citron (2004) revealed that body-focused dress may have a positive effect on female performance. She further stated that emphasising female sexuality in performance could attract greater numbers of audience members. This finding was consistent with the findings of this study. The participants agreed that body-focused dress was acceptable but that over-revealing dress was really inhibiting and distracting in performance. Also in line with the literature the participants reported that body-focused dress attracted greater audiences, thus exerting a beneficial effect on the future of classical vocal performance.

The concept of respect for the art form appeared in both the literature and the findings of this study. Griffiths (2009) reported that performers confirmed and accepted the formality and cultural practice through the medium of dress in the performance of Western classical

music. Both audience members and performers showed preference to formal attire when classical music is performed, thus making it a “code of conduct” (Griffiths 2009: 175).

This study confirmed previous findings and also added to the growing body of literature on the concept of the respect for the art form which a performer conveys through dress.

Vocalist E referred to concert dress, as a “standard code of conduct” that performers should adhere to. Furthermore, vocalist F reported that dress was not only a sign of respect for the audience, but also part of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The findings from this study make several significant contributions to current literature. Novel concepts that emerged from this study were the factors that impact on the selection of concert dress with the time of day, the venue and the occasion having a significant effect on the selection of concert dress. Thus, this research study extends existing knowledge about the external factors that play an important role in the selection of concert dress.

This study also contributed to the field of research into concert dress in numerous other ways. The participants expressed their views on the importance of repertoire for concert dress. The data revealed that concert dress should conform to the choice of repertoire although still be affected by personal style. The participants also reported that both dress and colour convey different messages in performance. For example, in general, red, body-focused dress should be avoided when performing sacred works or an oratorio, although it would be suitable for a recital of secular works of a more seductive nature.

Fach has an impact on the selection of concert dress. Vocalist B reported that sopranos often wear ball gowns whereas mezzo-sopranos generally wear less elaborate dress:

Anderson (2005) emphasised the importance of striking a balance between an elaborate appearance and not distracting the audience from the music and the text so as to ensure that integrity of the music and the performer does not decline (Anderson 2005: 124; Griffiths 2011: 43). This study confirms the findings of both Anderson (2005) and Griffiths (2011) with vocalists C, D and the designer expressing that the integrity and importance of the music and text should always come first in a performance. Although the dress is an

important component of the performance, it should never distract the audience or performer from the most important part: music and text.

The integrity of the music and the performer was a dominant theme in the study findings. Hagberg (2003) states that performers should not dress too flamboyantly, as a performance is not a fashion show. This statement was supported by the following excerpt:

**Vocalist E:** So it's a compromise: either you sing, or you become a fashion model.

This study also addressed numerous novel aspects of performance that current literature has failed to explore. The importance of make-up and accessories was significant with the importance of shoes being mentioned by all the participants. One participant felt that high heels helped with breath support in performance while the other participants all stated that high heels should be avoided. A "comfortable" heel was recommended by all the participants.

Hair and fabric are both issues that are addressed in Hagberg's (2003) manual on stage presence. This study elaborates on Hagberg's recommendations by including dress colour, skin tone and the effects of stage lighting on the choice of concert dress.

## 5.2 Summary

The investigation into concert dress has shown that there are numerous factors that contribute to the final selection of a dress for a performance. The psychological effects of dress suggest that dress has the ability to elevate the vocalist's experience of a performance and also to cater for the individual requirements of the body. In view of the fact that every body type is unique, concert dress should meet individual tastes and needs. This study highlighted the significant effect of concert dress not only on the performer, but also on the audience members, albeit in both a negative and a positive way.

Audiences are entertained by beautiful dress while performers are empowered by beautiful dress. However, to avoid any distraction from the music, concert dress should not be overly spectacular. This study confirmed that performers' feelings of either discomfort or empowerment may be sensed by the audience. If the performer is uncomfortable, the

audience is uncomfortable. On the other hand, if a performer is confident, this radiates to the audience. This highlights the importance of feeling comfortable, confident and empowered on stage, as this will result in a better performance. This study provides additional evidence and recommendations with respect to education in the fields of concert dress and stage etiquette, evidence which is consistent with the findings of Lehmann et al. (2007).



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 Introduction

This dissertation investigated the meaning of concert dress in the performances of female classical vocalists. Chapter 1 contained an introduction to the study. The chapter also discussed the aims of the research study, the research questions, methodology, ethical considerations and delimitations of the study and included a chapter outline. Chapter 2 contained a detailed overview of current literature on female identity, body image and femininity, the general effects of clothing on self-image, the body image of female classical musicians, the effects of clothing on female classical musicians and, lastly, the body image of the female classical vocalist. Chapter 3 discussed the methodological procedures which were used in the study to investigate the research questions while chapter 4 presented a detailed analysis of the research findings. Chapter 5 contained a discussion of the research in relation to current literature while chapter 6 discusses the conclusions drawn from the study. The main research question and its sub-questions are to be addressed in this chapter.

#### 6.2 Addressing the research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Main research question: What is the meaning of concert dress in female vocal performance?

Research sub-questions:

- 1) In what ways are concert dress and a positive body image connected?
- 2) To what extent does choice of repertoire affect the selection of concert dress?
- 3) To what extent does dress influence the stage behaviour and body movements of the female classical vocalist?

The following section will address the sub-questions before the main research question is addressed.

##### 6.2.1 In what ways are concert dress and a positive body image connected?

Research has confirmed that the body image of women, both musicians and non-musicians, is influenced by clothing. A positive body image which is fostered by dress is referred to as

empowerment through dress. Under this concept of body image significant themes such as confidence, mental comfort and the effect of dress on stage behaviour and persona were discussed. All the participants agreed that the main requirement of concert dress is that it be comfortable. If concert dress is both comfortable and secure, it boosts self-confidence. One participant made a fascinating comparison between concert dress and a good accompanist. She maintained that a good accompanist will always know the music, follow and support the singer and pick up when the singer has run out of breath, thus salvaging the situation. She felt that a performer should be able to trust her dress in the same way that she trusts a good accompanist.

Empowerment through dress is also enabled by the performer feeling beautiful and by audience appreciation. One participant reported that the audience “applauded uncontrollably” the minute she had set foot on stage, thus showed its appreciation of and admiration for the dress.

A positive body image is also connected to the element of personal style which is incorporated in concert dress. However, the most important requirements of concert dress are good fit and comfort (mental comfort and physical comfort). The relevance of concert dress to a positive body image is clearly supported by the findings of this study.

### **6.2.2 To what extent does choice of repertoire affect the selection of concert dress?**

Although the literature has examined the relation between concert dress and genre, it has failed to explore the effect of repertoire on the selection of concert dress. However, this study revealed that repertoire does have an effect on concert dress. For example, one participant reported that one does not wear the same dress in an opera gala and a Schubert Lieder recital.

However, the participants revealed that a close adherence to repertoire may transform concert dress into costume. The study also found that personal style in concert dress is beneficial to the interpretation of the music. Thus, the ideal is a balance between personal style and adherence to repertoire in concert dress.

### **6.2.3 To what extent does dress influence the stage behaviour and body movements of the female classical vocalist?**

Lehmann et al. (2007) stated that audiences perceive confidence through both body movements and stage behaviour. The participants reported that dress assisted them in projecting an image of confidence. Some of the participants reported that dress and accessories play a role in the successful portrayal of a character, referring to dress and accessories as a “communication tool”. If concert dress does, indeed, have a positive effect on stage behaviour and body movements then this is closely related to empowerment through dress.

Concert dress may, however, have an adverse effect on stage behaviour and restrict body movements. Ill-fitting and over-revealing dress were cited as the main inhibiting factors of dress as these may inhibit expressivity and, therefore, compromise the overall quality of the performance. Thus, in line with the findings of Lehmann et al. (2007), this study revealed that the significant effect of dress on stage behaviour, persona and body movements.

### **6.3 Main research question: What is the meaning of concert dress in female vocal performance?**

In essence, the meaning of concert dress in female vocal performance is influenced by a number of factors. The psychological impact of dress is related to both confidence and body image. One of the main requirements of concert dress is that of comfort, both mental comfort and physical comfort. The participants expressed strong opinions on the effect of individuality and repertoire on dress. It may be concluded that there should be a balance between individuality and adherence to repertoire. Concert dress is also significantly affected by other factors such as occasion and venue: the bigger the occasion and the venue, the “bigger” and more elaborate the concert dress will be. Concert dress plays a pivotal role in performance with one participant reporting that concert dress may “make or break a performance”. Most of the participants were of the opinion that performance training should include in the curriculum guidance on concert dress as students often dress inappropriately for both examinations and performances. The relevance of the effect of

concert dress on female classical vocal performance is clearly evident in the findings of this study.

#### **6.4 Shortcomings of the research study**

A small sample size (seven participants) implies that the findings of the study may not be transferable to all ethnic and age groups because of varying views on fashion and appropriateness of dress.

The interview schedule was closely adhered to although I allowed the participants to talk freely about their lived experiences. Methods of data collection such as diaries and personal accounts were not used in this study, with the study making use only of the primary form of data collection in an IPA, namely, semi-structured interviews (Willig 2010: 187). The delineated scope of this study meant that follow-up interviews were not conducted. However, future research may consider follow-up interviews.

#### **6.5 Recommendations for further research**

All the participants discussed the importance of comfortable shoes in performance. There were, however, different opinions on the subject of high heels. One participant felt that high heels assisted with breath support while all the other participants recommended a “comfortable heel” and avoiding high heels. Further research into the effect of high heels on both the spine and breath support could be conducted to establish whether indeed high heels have an important effect on vocal quality.

#### **6.6 Concluding comments**

During a performance audience members have ample time to form impressions about and/or judge a performer’s appearance. In view of a lack of training, observation remains the main source of education in respect of concert dress etiquette. Thus, the female vocalist styles herself based on her lived experience. It is the dual role of the vocalist as both a performer and, on occasion, an audience member that ensures a holistic mental image of the perceived self. It is important for the female vocalist to spend time preparing her stage

appearance to ensure a confident performance. Thus, it is essential that the meaning of concert dress, together with other factors affecting appearance, not be taken lightly.

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## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interview schedule: female classical vocalists

1. Tell me about your understanding of the role of dress in performance.
2. Dress has a profound effect on body image in the performance situation. What are your thoughts on this phenomenon?
3. What impact will the choice of repertoire have on the selection of concert dress?
- 4.1. It has been said that audience perceive performers' self-confidence through dress and stage behaviour. What are your views about this?
- 4.2. Does dress affect your stage behaviour?
5. What is most important when selecting a dress for a recital?
6. When looking for a concert dress, what should be avoided?
7. The concept of "mental comfort" refers to the state of not being concerned about any aspect of your concert dress, which may distract you in performance. What are your thoughts on the concept of "mental comfort" with regards to dress in the performance situation?
- 8.1. Drawing from previous experience, have you ever found dress to be restricting in performance?
- 8.2. Have you ever found dress to be empowering in the performance situation?
- 9.1. In what ways could concert dress be used as a communication tool used between audience and performer?
- 9.2. What is more important: using dress to convey individuality of personal style, or using dress to conform to the choice of repertoire?
- 10.1. Have you performed in various styles of dress, and how did you feel during the performance? Please elaborate.
- 10.2. To what extent do you think that more elaborate dress, such as a ball gown, will affect the audience's perception of your performance?
- 10.3. Do you think that elaborate dress has the ability to enhance the quality of a performance? If so, in what way?
11. Do you think that dress has an impact on the perception of ability?
12. Has your training influenced your opinion of concert dress?

13. What are your views about the tradition of wearing formal concert dress as a classical artist?
14. What are your thoughts on the popular trend of classical artists wearing more body-focussed dress?
15. In what ways do social norms influence your selection of concert dress?
16. Hypothetically, as a teacher, what advice would you give to students with regard to the importance of concert dress?
17. Were you given guidance on appropriate concert dress by your teacher?
18. Is there anything else about concert dress you would like to share?

## Appendix B

Semi-structured interview schedule: designer (Henry Schickerling)

1. From your experience of working with internationally famous female classical vocalists, what do you think is the role of dress in concert performances?
2. What are your thoughts on the effect of concert dress on body image in the performance situation?
3. To what extent do singers use dress as an expression of individuality and personal style, and does this vary with choice of repertoire?
4. What do they regard as the most important when requesting a dress for a performance? For example, is freedom of body movement of great importance when choosing a concert dress?
5. When discussing dress for a performance, what do singers want to avoid at all cost?
6. What are your thoughts on the effect of dress on stage behaviour and self-confidence on stage?
7. What are your thoughts on the current trend of classical artists wearing more body-focussed dress?
8. What in your experience are the current trends for concert dress, or have preferences remained the same over the years.
9. Is there anything else about concert dress you would like to share?

## Appendix C

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
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UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

PRETORIA, 0002, SOUTH AFRICA

March 2013

### **Participant Informed Consent Form: semi-structured questionnaire to be completed online**

I would like to invite you to take part in my study entitled *Impact of concert dress on vocal performance: a phenomenological study* for my MMus degree. The aim of the study is to investigate and explore your experiences and perceptions of the role of concert dress in performance. Should you agree, I will email you a questionnaire asking about your experience of concert dress which you may complete in your own time and send back to me within a week. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

There are no risks or discomfort foreseen. There are no direct benefits to you, although the research will benefit female classical vocalists as it will shed light on the role and the importance of concert dress. Little research has been done focussing on the role of concert dress from the performer's perspective and this study aims to fill that void. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without negative consequences to you.

All information will be treated as confidential and participation will be completely anonymous, unless otherwise agreed. The data gathered will be used for the purposes of the study, which will be in agreement with the research goals. The study may culminate in an article which could be published in a scientific journal. All data will be stored in electronic format at the premises of the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information.

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**Appendix D**  
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UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
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### **Participant Informed Consent Form: face to face interviews**

I would like to invite you to take part in my study entitled *Impact of concert dress on vocal performance: a phenomenological study* for my MMus degree. The aim of the study is to investigate and explore your experiences and perceptions of the role of concert dress in performance .Should you agree, data will be collected by semi-structured interviews which will be recorded and transcribed for analysis.

There are risks or discomfort foreseen. All information will be treated as confidential. Your name will not be mentioned in the study as you will either be given a pseudonym or assigned a number.

There are no direct benefits to you, although the research will benefit female classical vocalists as it will shed light on the role and the importance of concert dress. The study will help them to consider this in the event of a performance. Little research has been done focussing on the role of concert dress from the performer's perspective and this study aims to fill that void. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without negative consequences to you.

All information will be treated as confidential and participation will be completely anonymous. The data gathered will be used for the purposes of the study, which will be in agreement with the research goals. All data will be stored in electronic format at the premises of the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information.

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### Participant Informed Consent Form

**Researcher:** Miss Marina Botha

**Research Title:** The meaning of concert dress in vocal performance: a phenomenological study

I have read the contents of the information sheet and fully understand that I have been invited to participate and my agreeing is voluntary.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study on this \_\_\_\_\_  
day of this \_\_\_\_\_ month in the year \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Details:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher and Supervisor Signatures:**

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_